

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND  
SHERWOOD  
TALES OF THE MERMAID TAVERN  
NEW POEMS





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Grace Titus Woodruff

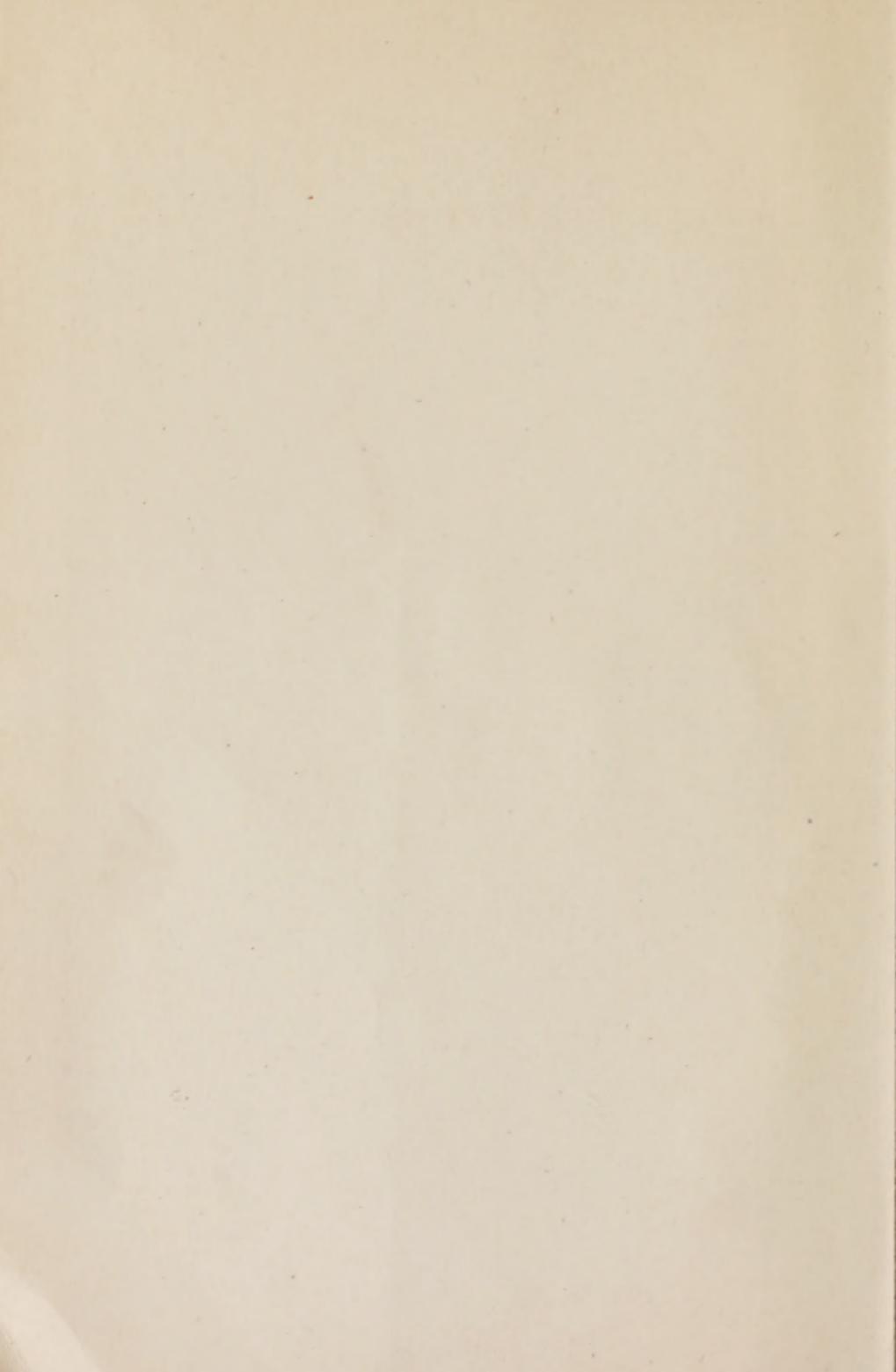


My owner is glad to lend me  
And have you read me, too -  
But please, oh please return me  
As soon as you are through!

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**COLLECTED POEMS**

VOLUME II.



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# COLLECTED POEMS

BY  
ALFRED NOYES



VOLUME TWO

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# COLLECTED POEMS

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## THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

AND OTHER POEMS

### MIST IN THE VALLEY

#### I

Mist in the valley, weeping mist  
Beset my homeward way.  
No gleam of rose or amethyst  
Hallowed the parting day;  
A shroud, a shroud of awful grey  
Wrapped every woodland brow,  
And drooped in crumbling disarray  
Around each wintry bough.

#### II

And closer round me now it clung  
Until I scarce could see  
The stealthy pathway overhung  
By silent tree and tree  
Which floated in that mystery  
As—poised in waveless deeps—  
Branching in worlds below the sea,  
The grey sea-forest sleeps.

#### III

Mist in the valley, mist no less  
Within my groping mind!  
The stile swam out: a wilderness  
Rolled round it, grey and blind.

A yard in front, a yard behind,  
So strait my world was grown,  
I stooped to win once more some kind  
Glimmer of twig or stone.

## IV

I crossed and lost the friendly stile  
And listened. Never a sound  
Came to me. Mile on mile on mile  
It seemed the world around  
Beneath some infinite sea lay drowned  
With all that e'er drew breath;  
Whilst I, alone, had strangely found  
A moment's life in death.

## V

A universe of lifeless grey  
Oppressed me overhead.  
Below, a yard of clinging clay  
With rotting foliage red  
Glimmered. The stillness of the dead,  
Hark!—was it broken now  
By the slow drip of tears that bled  
From hidden heart or bough.

## VI

Mist in the valley, mist no less  
That muffled every cry  
Across the soul's grey wilderness  
Where faith lay down to die;  
Buried beyond all hope was I,  
Hope had no meaning there:  
A yard above my head the sky  
Could only mock at prayer.

## VII

E'en as I groped along, the gloom  
    Suddenly shook at my feet!  
O, strangely as from a rending tomb  
    In resurrection, sweet  
Swift wings tumultuously beat  
    Away! I paused to hark—  
O, birds of thought, too fair, too fleet  
    To follow across the dark!

## VIII

Yet, like a madman's dream, there came  
    One fair swift flash to me  
Of distances, of streets a-flame  
    With joy and agony,  
And further yet, a moon-lit sea  
    Foaming across its bars,  
And further yet, the infinity  
    Of wheeling suns and stars,

## IX

And further yet . . . O, mist of suns  
    I grope amidst your light,  
O, further yet, what vast response  
    From what transcendent height?  
Wild wings that burst thro' death's dim night  
    I can but pause and hark;  
For O, ye are too swift, too white,  
    To follow across the dark!

## X

Mist in the valley, yet I saw,  
    And in my soul I knew  
The gleaming City whence I draw  
    The strength that then I drew,  
My misty pathway to pursue  
    With steady pulse and breath  
Through these dim forest-ways of dew  
    And darkness, life and death.

## A SONG OF THE PLOUGH

## I

*(Morning.)*

IDLE, comfortless, bare,  
 The broad bleak acres lie:  
 The ploughman guides the sharp ploughshare  
 Steadily nigh.

The big plough-horses lift  
 And climb from the marge of the sea,  
 And the clouds of their breath on the clear wind drift  
 Over the fallow lea.

Streaming up with the yoke,  
 Brown as the sweet-smelling loam,  
 Thro' a sun-swept smother of sweat and smoke  
 The two great horses come.

Up thro' the raw cold morn  
 They trample and drag and swing;  
 And my dreams are waving with ungrown corn  
 In a far-off spring.

It is my soul lies bare  
 Between the hills and the sea:  
 Come, ploughman Life, with thy sharp ploughshare,  
 And plough the field for me.

## II

*(Evening.)*

Over the darkening plain  
 As the stars regain the sky,  
 Steals the chime of an unseen rein  
 Steadily nigh.

Lost in the deepening red  
The sea has forgotten the shore:  
The great dark steeds with their muffled tread  
Draw near once more.

To the furrow's end they sweep  
Like a sombre wave of the sea,  
Lifting its crest to challenge the deep  
Hush of Eternity.

Still for a moment they stand,  
Massed on the sun's red death,  
A surge of bronze, too great, too grand,  
To endure for more than a breath.

Only the billow and stream  
Of muscle and flank and mane  
Like darkling mountain-cataracts gleam  
Gripped in a Titan's rein.

Once more from the furrow's end  
They wheel to the fallow lea,  
And down the muffled slope descend  
To the sleeping sea.

And the fibrous knots of clay,  
And the sun-dried clots of earth  
Cleave, and the sunset cloaks the grey  
Waste and the stony dearth!

O, broad and dusky and sweet,  
The sunset covers the weald;  
But my dreams are waving with golden wheat  
In a still strange field.

My soul, my soul lies bare,  
Between the hills and the sea;  
Come, ploughman Death, with thy sharp ploughshare,  
And plough the field for me.

## THE BANNER

WHO in the gorgeous vanguard of the years  
 With wingèd helmet glistens, let him hold  
 Ere he pluck down this banner, crying "It bears  
 An old device"; for, though it seem the old,

It is the new! No rent shroud of the past,  
 But its transfigured spirit that still shines  
 Triumphantly before the foremost lines,  
 Even from the first prophesying the last.

And whoso dreams to pluck it down shall stand  
 Bewildered, while the great host thunders by;  
 And he shall show the rent shroud in his hand  
 And "Lo, I lead the van!" he still shall cry;

While leagues away, the spirit-banner shines  
 Rushing in triumph before the foremost lines.

## RANK AND FILE

## I

DRUM-TAPS! Drum-taps! Who is it marching,  
 Marching past in the night? Ah, hark,  
 Draw your curtains aside and see  
 Endless ranks of the stars o'er-arching  
 Endless ranks of an army marching,  
 Marching out of the measureless dark,  
 Marching away to Eternity.

## II

See the gleam of the white sad faces  
 Moving steadily, row on row,  
 Marching away to their hopeless wars:  
 Drum-taps, drum-taps, where are they marching?  
 Terrible, beautiful, human faces,  
 Common as dirt, but softer than snow,  
 Coarser than clay, but calm as the stars.

## III

Is it the last rank readily, steadily  
 Swinging away to the unknown doom?  
 Ere you can think it, the drum-taps beat  
 Louder, and here they come marching, marching,  
 Great new level locked ranks of them readily  
 Steadily swinging out of the gloom  
 Marching endlessly down the street.

## IV

Unregarded imperial regiments  
 White from the roaring intricate places  
 Deep in the maw of the world's machine,  
 Well content, they are marching, marching,  
 Unregarded imperial regiments,  
 Ay, and there are those terrible faces  
 Great world-heroes that might have been.

## V

Hints and facets of One—the Eternal,  
 Faces of grief, compassion and pain,  
 Faces of hunger, faces of stone,  
 Faces of love and of labour, marching,  
 Changing facets of One—the Eternal,  
 Streaming up thro' the wind and the rain,  
 All together and each alone.

## VI

You that doubt of the world's one Passion,  
 You for whose science the stars are a-stray,  
 Hark—to their orderly thunder-tread!  
 These, in the night, with the stars are marching  
 One to the end of the world's one Passion!  
 You that have taken their Master away,  
 Where have you laid Him, living or dead?

## RANK AND FILE

### VII

You whose laws have hidden the One Law,  
    You whose searchings obscure the goal,  
        You whose systems from chaos begun,  
Chance-born, order-less, hark, they are marching,  
Hearts and tides and stars to the One Law,  
    Measured and orderly, rhythmical, whole,  
        Multitudinous, welded and one.

### VIII

Split your threads of the seamless purple,  
    Round you marches the world-wide host,  
        Round your skies is the marching sky,  
Out in the night there's an army marching,  
Clothed with the night's own seamless purple,  
    Making death for the King their boast,  
        Marching straight to Eternity.

### IX

What do you know of the shot-riddled banners  
    Royally surging out of the gloom,  
        You whose denials their souls despise?  
Out in the night they are marching, marching!  
Treasure your wisdom, and leave them their banners!  
    Then—when you follow them down to the tomb  
        Pray for one glimpse of the faith in their eyes.

### X

Pray for one gleam of the white sad faces,  
    Moving steadily, row on row,  
        Marching away to their hopeless wars,  
Doomed to be trodden like dung, but marching,  
Terrible, beautiful human faces,  
    Common as dirt, but softer than snow,  
        Coarser than clay, but calm as the stars.

## XI

What of the end? Will your knowledge escape it?  
 What or the end of their dumb dark tears?  
 You who mock at their faith and sing,  
 Look, for their ragged old banners are marching  
 Down to the end—will your knowledge escape it?—  
 Down to the end of a few brief years!  
 What should they care for the wisdom you bring.

## XII

Count as they pass, their hundreds, thousands,  
 Millions, marching away to a doom  
 Younger than London, older than Tyre!  
 Drum-taps, drum-taps, where are they marching,  
 Regiments, nations, empires, marching?  
 Down thro' the jaws of a world-wide tomb,  
 Doomed or ever they sprang from the mire!

## XIII

Doomed to be shovelled like dung to the midden,  
 Trodden and kneaded as clay in the road,  
 Father and little one, lover and friend,  
 Out in the night they are marching, marching,  
 Doomed to be shovelled like dung to the midden,  
 Bodies that bowed beneath Christ's own load,  
 Love that—marched to the self-same end.

## XIV

What of the end?—O, not of your glory,  
 Not of your wealth or your fame that will live  
 Half as long as this pellet of dust!—  
 Out in the night there's an army marching,  
 Nameless, noteless, empty of glory,  
 Ready to suffer and die and forgive,  
 Marching onward in simple trust,

## XV

Wearing their poor little toy love-tokens  
 Under the march of the terrible skies!  
 Is it a jest for a God to play?—  
 Whose is the jest of these millions marching,  
 Wearing their poor little toy love-tokens,  
 Waving their voicelessly grand good-byes,  
 Secretly trying, sometimes, to pray.

## XVI

Dare you dream their trust in Eternity  
 Broken, O you to whom prayers are vain,  
 You who dream that their God is dead?  
 Take your answer—these millions marching  
 Out of Eternity, into Eternity,  
 These that smiled “We shall meet again,”  
 Even as the life from their loved one fled.

## XVII

This is the answer, not of the sages,  
 Not of the loves that are ready to part,  
 Ready to find their oblivion sweet!  
 Out in the night there's an army marching,  
 Men that have toiled thro' the endless ages,  
 Men of the pit and the desk and the mart,  
 Men that remember, the men in the street,

## XVIII

These that into the gloom of Eternity  
 Stream thro' the dream of this lamp-starred town  
 London, an army of clouds to-night!  
 These that of old came marching, marching,  
 Out of the terrible gloom of Eternity,  
 Bowing their heads at Rameses' frown.  
 Streaming away thro' Babylon's light;

## XIX

These that swept at the sound of the trumpet  
Out thro' the night like gonfaloned clouds,  
Exiled hosts when the world was Rome,  
Tossing their tattered old eagles, marching  
Down to sleep till the great last trumpet,  
London, Nineveh, rend your shrouds,  
Rally the legions and lead them home,

## XX

Lead them home with their glorious faces  
Moving steadily, row on row  
Marching up from the end of wars,  
Out of the Valley of Shadows, marching,  
Terrible, beautiful, human faces,  
Common as dirt, but softer than snow,  
Coarser than clay, but calm as the stars,

## XXI

Marching out of the endless ages,  
Marching out of the dawn of time,  
Endless columns of unknown men,  
Endless ranks of the stars o'er-arching  
Endless ranks of an army marching  
Numberless out of the numberless ages,  
Men out of every race and clime,  
Marching steadily, now as then.

## THE SKY-LARK CAGED

## I

BEAT, little breast, against the wires.  
Strive, little wings and misted eyes  
Which one wild gleam of memory fires  
Beseeching still the unfettered skies,  
Whither at dewy dawn you sprang  
Quivering with joy from this dark earth and sang.

## II

And still you sing—your narrow cage  
 Shall set at least your music free!  
 Its rapturous wings in glorious rage  
 Mount and are lost in liberty,  
 While those who caged you creep on earth  
 Blind prisoners from the hour that gave them birth.

## III

Sing! The great City surges round.  
 Blinded with light, thou canst not know.  
 Dream! 'Tis the fir-woods' windy sound  
 Rolling a psalm of praise below.  
 Sing, o'er the bitter dust and shame,  
 And touch us with thine own transcendent flame.

## IV

Sing, o'er the City dust and slime;  
 Sing, o'er the squalor and the gold,  
 The greed that darkens earth with crime,  
 The spirits that are bought and sold.  
 O, shower the healing notes like rain,  
 And lift us to the height of grief again.

## V

Sing! The same music swells your breast,  
 And the wild notes are still as sweet  
 As when above the fragrant nest  
 And the wide billowing fields of wheat  
 You soared and sang the livelong day,  
 And in the light of heaven dissolved away.

## VI

The light of heaven! Is it not here?  
 One rapture, one ecstatic joy,  
 One passion, one sublime despair,  
 One grief which nothing can destroy,  
 You—though your dying eyes are wet  
 Remember, 'tis our blunted hearts forget.

## VII

Beat, little breast, still beat, still beat,  
 Strive, misted eyes and tremulous wings;  
 Swell, little throat, your *Sweet! Sweet! Sweet!*  
 Thro' which such deathless memory rings:  
 Better to break your heart and die,  
 Than, like your gaolers, to forget your sky.

## THE LOVERS' FLIGHT

## I

COME, the dusk is lit with flowers!  
 Quietly take this guiding hand:  
 Little breath to waste is ours  
 On the road to lovers' land.  
 Time is in his dungeon-keep!  
 Ah, not thither, lest he hear,  
 Starting from his old grey sleep,  
 Rosy feet upon the stair.

## II

Ah, not thither, lest he heed  
 Ere we reach the rusty door!  
 Nay, the stairways only lead  
 Back to his dark world once more:  
 There's a merrier way we know  
 Leading to a lovelier night—  
 See, your casement all a-glow  
 Diamonding the wonder-light.

## III

Fling the flowery lattice wide,  
 Let the silken ladder down,  
 Swiftly to the garden glide  
 Glimmering in your long white gown,

Rosy from your pillow, sweet,  
 Come, unsandalled and divine;  
 Let the blossoms stain your feet  
 And the stars behold them shine.

## IV

Swift, our pawing palfreys wait,  
 And the page—Dan Cupid—frets,  
 Holding at the garden gate  
 Reins that chime like castanets,  
 Bits a-foam with fairy flakes  
 Flung from seas whence Venus rose:  
 Come, for Father Time awakes  
 And the star of morning glows.

## V

Swift—one satin foot shall sway  
 Half a heart-beat in my hand,  
 Swing to stirrup and swift away  
 Down the road to lovers' land:  
 Ride—the moon is dusky gold,  
 Ride—our hearts are young and warm,  
 Ride—the hour is growing old,  
 And the next may break the charm.

## VI

Swift, ere we that thought the song  
 Full—for others—of the truth,  
 We that smiled, contented, strong,  
 Dowered with endless wealth of youth;  
 Find that like a summer cloud  
 Youth indeed has crept away,  
 Find the robe a clinging shroud  
 And the hair be-sprent with grey.

## VII

Ride—we'll leave it all behind,  
All the turmoil and the tears,  
All the mad vindictive blind  
Yelping of the heartless years!  
Ride—the ringing world's in chase,  
Yet we've slipped old Father Time,  
By the love-light in your face  
And the jingle of this rhyme.

## VIII

Ride—for still the hunt is loud!  
Ride—our steeds can hold their own!  
Yours, a satin sea-wave, proud,  
Queen, to be your living throne,  
Glittering with the foam and fire  
Churned from seas whence Venus rose,  
Tow'rd the gates of our desire  
Gloriously burning flows.

## IX

He, with streaming flanks a-smoke,  
Needs no spur of blood-stained steel:  
Only that soft thudding stroke  
Once, o' the little satin heel,  
Drives his mighty heart, your slave,  
Bridled with these bells of rhyme,  
Onward, like a crested wave  
Thundering out of hail of Time.

## X

On, till from a rosy spark  
Fairy-small as gleams your hand,  
Broadening as we cleave the dark,  
Dawn the gates of lovers' land,

Nearing, sweet, till breast and brow  
 Lifted through the purple night  
 Catch the deepening glory now  
 And your eyes the wonder-light.

## XI

E'en as tow'rd your face I lean  
 Swooping nigh the gates of bliss,  
 I the king and you the queen  
 Crown each other with a kiss.  
 Riding, soaring like a song  
 Burn we tow'rds the heaven above,  
 You the sweet and I the strong  
 And in both the fire of love.

## XII

Ride—though now the distant chase  
 Knows that we have slipped old Time,  
 Lift the love-light of your face,  
 Shake the bridle of this rhyme,  
 See, the flowers of night and day  
 Streaming past on either hand,  
 Ride into the eternal May,  
 Ride into the lovers' land.

## THE ROCK POOL

## I

BRIGHT as a fallen fragment of the sky,  
 Mid shell-encrusted rocks the sea-pool shone,  
 Glassing the sunset-clouds in its clear heart,  
 A small enchanted world enwalled apart  
 In diamond mystery,  
 Content with its own dreams, its own strict zone  
 Of urchin woods, its fairy bights and bars,  
 Its daisy-disked anemones and rose-feathered stars.

## II

Forsaken for awhile by that deep roar  
 Which works in storm and calm the eternal will,  
 Drags down the cliffs, bids the great hills go by  
 And shepherds their multitudinous pageantry,—  
 Here, on this ebb-tide shore  
 A jewelled bath of beauty, sparkling still,  
 The little sea-pool smiled away the sea,  
 And slept on its own plane of bright tranquillity.

## III

A self-sufficing soul, a pool in trance,  
 Un-stirred by all the spirit-winds that blow  
 From o'er the gulfs of change, content, ere yet  
 On its own crags, which rough peaked limpets fret  
 The last rich colours glance,  
 Content to mirror the sea-bird's wings of snow,  
 Or feel in some small creek, ere sunset fails,  
 A tiny Nautilus hoist its lovely purple sails:

## IV

And, furrowing into pearl that rosy bar,  
 Sail its own soul from fairy fringe to fringe,  
 Lured by the twinkling prey 'twas born to reach  
 In its own pool, by many an elfin beach  
 Of jewels, adventuring far  
 Through the last mirrored cloud and sunset-tinge  
 And past the rainbow-dripping cave where lies  
 The dark green pirate-crab at watch with beaded eyes,

## V

Or fringed Medusa floats like light in light,  
 Medusa, with the loveliest of all fays  
 Pent in its irised bubble of jellied sheen,  
 Trailing long ferns of moonlight, shot with green  
     And crimson rays and white,  
 Waving ethereal tendrils, ghostly sprays,  
     Daring the deep, dissolving in the sun,  
     The vanishing point of life, the light whence life  
     begun.

## VI

Poised between me, light, time, eternity,  
     So tinged with all, that in its delicate brain  
 Kindling it as a lamp with her bright wings  
 Day-long, night-long, young Ariel sits and sings  
     Echoing the lucid sea,  
 Listening it echo her own unearthly strain,  
     Watching through lucid walls the world's rich tide,  
     One light, one substance with her own, rise and  
     subside.

## VII

And over soft brown woods, limpid, serene,  
     Puffing its fans the Nautilus went its way,  
 And from a hundred salt and weedy shelves  
 Peered little hornèd faces of sea-elves:  
     The prawn darted, half-seen,  
 Thro' watery sunlight, like a pale green ray,  
     And all around, from soft green waving bowers,  
     Creatures like fruit out-crept from fluted shells like  
     flowers.

## VIII

And, over all, that glowing mirror spread  
     The splendour of its heaven-reflecting gleams,  
 A level wealth of tints, calm as the sky  
 That broods above our own mortality:  
     The temporal seas had fled,  
 And ah, what hopes, what fears, what mystic dreams  
     Could ruffle it now from any deeper deep?  
     Content in its own bounds it slept a changeless sleep.

## IX

Suddenly, from that heaven beyond belief,  
     Suddenly, from that world beyond its ken,  
 Dashing great billows o'er its rosy bars,  
 Shivering its dreams into a thousand stars,  
     Flooding each sun-dried reef  
 With waves of colour, (as once, for mortal men  
     Bethesda's angel) with blue eyes, wide and wild,  
     Naked into the pool there stepped a little child.

## X

Her red-gold hair against the far green sea  
     Blew thickly out: her slender golden form  
 Shone dark against the richly waning West  
 As with one hand she splashed her glistening breast,  
     Then waded up to her knee  
 And frothed the whole pool into a fairy storm! . . .  
     So, stooping through our skies, of old, there came  
 Angels that once could set this world's dark pool  
     a-flame,

## XI

From which the seas of faith have ebbed away,  
 Leaving the lonely shore too bright, too bare,  
 While mirrored softly in the smooth wet sand  
 A deeper sunset sees its blooms expand  
 But all too phantom-fair,  
 Between the dark brown rocks and sparkling spray  
 Where the low ripples pleaded, shrank and sighed,  
 And tossed a moment's rainbow heavenward ere they  
 died.

## XII

Stoop, starry souls, incline to this dark coast,  
 Where all too long, too faithlessly, we dream.  
 Stoop to the world's dark pool, its crags and scars,  
 Its yellow sands, its rosy harbour-bars,  
 And soft green wastes that gleam  
 But with some glorious drifting god-like ghost  
 Of cloud, some vaguely passionate crimson stain:  
 Rend the blue waves of heaven, shatter our sleep  
 again!

## THE ISLAND HAWK

(A SONG FOR THE FIRST LAUNCHING OF HIS  
 MAJESTY'S AERIAL NAVY)

## I

*Chorus—*

*Ships have swept with my conquering name  
 Over the waves of war,  
 Swept thro' the Spaniards' thunder and flame  
 To the splendour of Trafalgar:  
 On the blistered decks of their great renown,*

*In the wind of my storm-beat wings,  
Hawkins and Hawke went sailing down  
To the harbour of deep-sea kings!*

*By the storm-beat wings of the hawk, the hawk,  
Beni beak and pitiless breast,  
They clove their way thro' the red sea-fray:  
Who wakens me now to the quest?*

## II

Hushed are the whimpering winds on the hill,  
Dumb is the shrinking plain,  
And the songs that enchanted the woods are still  
As I shoot to the skies again!  
Does the blood grow black on my fierce bent beak,  
Does the down still cling to my claw?  
Who brightened these eyes for the prey they seek?  
Life, I follow thy law!  
*For I am the hawk, the hawk, the hawk!*  
*Who knoweth my pitiless breast?*  
*Who watcheth me sway in the wild wind's way?*  
*Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.*

## III

As I glide and glide with my peering head,  
Or swerve at a puff of smoke,  
Who watcheth my wings on the wind outspread,  
Here—gone—with an instant stroke?  
Who toucheth the glory of life I feel  
As I buffet this great glad gale,  
Spire and spire to the cloud-world, wheel,  
Loosen my wings and sail?  
*For I am the hawk, the island hawk,*  
*Who knoweth my pitiless breast?*  
*Who watcheth me sway in the sun's bright way?*  
*Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.*

## IV

Had they given me "Cloud-cuckoo-city" to guard  
 Between mankind and the sky,  
 Tho' the dew might shine on an April sward,  
 Iris had ne'er passed by!  
 Swift as her beautiful wings might be  
 From the rosy Olympian hill,  
 Had Epos entrusted the gates to me  
 Earth were his kingdom still.  
*For I am the hawk, the archer, the hawk!*  
*Who knoweth my pitiless breast?*  
*Who watcheth me sway in the wild wind's way?*  
*Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.*

## V

My mate in the nest on the high bright tree  
 Blazing with dawn and dew,  
 She knoweth the gleam of the world and the glee  
 As I drop like a bolt from the blue;  
 She knoweth the fire of the level flight  
 As I skim, close, close to the ground,  
 With the long grass lashing my breast and the bright  
 Dew-drops flashing around.  
*She watcheth the hawk, the hawk, the hawk,*  
*(O, the red-blotted eggs in the nest!)*  
*Watcheth him sway in the sun's bright way;*  
*Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.*

## VI

She builded her nest on the high bright wold,  
 She was taught in a world afar,  
 The lore that is only an April old  
 Yet old as the evening star;

Life of a far off ancient day  
 In an hour unhooded her eyes;  
 In the time of the budding of one green spray  
 She was wise as the stars are wise.

*Brown flower of the tree of the hawk, the hawk,  
 On the old elm's burgeoning breast,  
 She watcheth me sway in the wild wind's way;  
 Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.*

## VII

Spirit and sap of the sweet swift Spring,  
 Fire of our island soul,  
 Burn in her breast and pulse in her wing  
 While the endless ages roll;  
 Avatar—she—of the perilous pride  
 That plundered the golden West,  
 Her glance is a sword, but it sweeps too wide  
 For a rumour to trouble her rest.

*She goeth her glorious way, the hawk,  
 She nurseth her brood alone;  
 She will not swoop for an owlet's whoop,  
 She hath calls and cries of her own.*

## VIII

There was never a dale in our isle so deep  
 That her wide wings were not free  
 To soar to the sovran heights and keep  
 Sight of the rolling sea:  
 Is it there, is it here in the rolling skies,  
 The realm of her future fame?  
 Look once, look once in her glittering eyes,  
 Ye shall find her the same, the same.  
*Up to the skies with the hawk, the hawk,  
 As it was in the days of old!  
 Ye shall sail once more, ye shall soar, ye shall  
 soar  
 To the new-found realms of gold.*

## IX

She hath ridden on white Arabian steeds  
 Thro' the ringing English dells,  
 For the joy of a great queen, hunting in state,  
 To the music of golden bells;  
 A queen's fair fingers have drawn the hood  
 And tossed her aloft in the blue,  
 A white hand eager for needless blood;  
 I hunt for the needs of two.

*Yet I am the hawk, the hawk, the hawk!*  
*Who knoweth my pitiless breast?*  
*Who watcheth me sway in the sun's bright way?*  
*Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.*

## X

Who fashioned her wide and splendid eyes  
 That have stared in the eyes of kings?  
 With a silken twist she was looped to their wrist:  
 She has clawed at their jewelled rings!  
 Who flung her first thro' the crimson dawn  
 To pluck him a prey from the skies,  
 When the love-light shone upon lake and lawn  
 In the valleys of Paradise?  
*Who fashioned the hawk, the hawk, the hawk,*  
*Bent beak and pitiless breast?*  
*Who watcheth him sway in the wild wind's way?*  
*Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.*

## XI

Is there ever a song in all the world  
 Shall say how the quest began  
 With the beak and the wings that have made us kings  
 And cruel—almost—as man?

The wild wind whimpers across the heath  
 Where the sad little tufts of blue  
 And the red-stained grey little feathers of death  
 Flutter! Who fashioned us? Who?  
*Who fashioned the scimitar wings of the hawk,  
 Bent beak and arrowy breast?  
 Who watcheth him sway in the sun's bright way?  
 Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.*

## XII

Linnet and woodpecker, red-cap and jay,  
 Shriek that a doom shall fall  
 One day, one day, on my pitiless way  
 From the sky that is over us all;  
 But the great blue hawk of the heavens above  
 Fashioned the world for his prey,—  
 King and queen and hawk and dove,  
 We shall meet in his clutch that day;  
*Shall I not welcome him, I, the hawk?  
 Yea, cry, as they shrink from his claw,  
 Cry, as I die, to the unknown sky,  
 Life, I follow thy law!*

## XIII

*Chorus—*

*Ships have swept with my conquering name . . .  
 Over the world and beyond,  
 Hark! Bellerophon, Marlborough, Thunderer,  
 Condor, respond!—  
 On the blistered decks of their dread renown,  
 In the rush of my storm-beat wings,  
 Hawkins and Hawke went sailing down  
 To the glory of deep-sea kings!  
 By the storm-beat wings of the hawk, the hawk,  
 Bent beak and pitiless breast,  
 They clove their way thro' the red sea-fray!  
 Who wakens me now to the quest.*

## THE ADMIRAL'S GHOST

I TELL you a tale to-night  
Which a seaman told to me,  
With eyes that gleamed in the lanthorn light  
And a voice as low as the sea.

You could almost hear the stars  
Twinkling up in the sky,  
And the old wind woke and moaned in the spars,  
And the same old waves went by,

Singing the same old song  
As ages and ages ago,  
While he froze my blood in that deep-sea night  
With the things that he seemed to know.

A bare foot pattered on deck;  
Ropes creaked; then—all grew still,  
And he pointed his finger straight in my face  
And growled, as a sea-dog will.

“Do’ ee know who Nelson was?  
That pore little shrivelled form  
With the patch on his eye and the pinned-up sleeve  
And a soul like a North Sea storm?

“Ask of the Devonshire men!  
They know, and they’ll tell you true;  
He wasn’t the pore little chawed-up chap  
That Hardy thought he knew.

“He wasn’t the man you think!  
His patch was a dern disguise!  
For he knew that they’d find him out, d’you see,  
If they looked him in both his eyes.

“He was twice as big as he seemed;  
But his clothes were cunningly made.  
He’d both of his hairy arms all right!  
The sleeve was a trick of the trade.

"You've heard of sperrits, no doubt;  
Well, there's more in the matter than that!  
But he wasn't the patch and he wasn't the sleeve,  
And he wasn't the laced cocked-hat.

"*Nelson was just—a Ghost!*  
You may laugh! But the Devonshire men  
They knew that he'd come when England called,  
And they know that he'll come again.

"I'll tell you the way it was  
(For none of the landsmen know),  
And to tell it you right, you must go a-starn  
Two hundred years or so.

• • • •  
"The waves were lapping and slapping  
The same as they are to-day;  
And Drake lay dying aboard his ship  
In Nombre Dios Bay.

"The scent of the foreign flowers  
Came floating all around;  
'But I'd give my soul for the smell o' the pitch,'  
Says he, 'in Plymouth Sound.

"'What shall I do,' he says,  
'When the guns begin to roar,  
An' England wants me, and me not there  
To shatter 'er foes once more?'

"(You've heard what he said, maybe,  
But I'll mark you the p'ints again;  
For I want you to box your compass right  
And get my story plain.)

"'You must take my drum,' he says,  
'To the old sea-wall at home;  
And if ever you strike that drum,' he says,  
'Why, strike me blind, I'll come!

“If England needs me, dead  
Or living, I'll rise that day!  
I'll rise from the darkness under the sea  
Ten thousand miles away.’

“That's what he said; and he died;  
An' his pirates, listenin' roun',  
With their crimson doublets and jewelled swords  
That flashed as the sun went down,

“They sewed him up in his shroud  
With a round-shot top and toe,  
To sink him under the salt sharp sea  
Where all good seamen go.

“They lowered him down in the deep,  
And there in the sunset light  
They boomed a broadside over his grave,  
As meanin' to say ‘Good-night.’

“They sailed away in the dark  
To the dear little isle they knew;  
And they hung his drum by the old sea-wall  
The same as he told them to.

• • • • •  
“Two hundred years went by,  
And the guns began to roar,  
And England was fighting hard for her life,  
As ever she fought of yore.

“It's only my dead that count,’  
She said, as she says to-day;  
‘It isn't the ships and it isn't the guns  
'Ull sweep Trafalgar's Bay.'

“D'you guess who Nelson was?  
You may laugh, but it's true as true!  
There was more in that pore little chawed-up chap  
Than ever his best friend knew.

“The foe was creepin’ close,  
 In the dark, to our white-cliffed isle;  
 They were ready to leap at England’s throat,  
 When—O, you may smile, you may smile;

“But—ask of the Devonshire men;  
 For they heard in the dead of night  
 The roll of a drum, and they saw *him* pass  
 On a ship all shining white.

“He stretched out his dead cold face  
 And he sailed in the grand old way!  
 The fishes had taken an eye and his arm,  
 But he swept Trafalgar’s Bay.

“Nelson—was Francis Drake!  
 O, what matters the uniform,  
 Or the patch on your eye or your pinned-up sleeve,  
 If your soul’s like a North Sea storm?”

## EDINBURGH

## I

City of mist and rain and blown grey spaces,  
 Dashed with wild wet colour and gleam of tears,  
 Dreaming in Holyrood halls of the passionate faces  
 Lifted to one Queen’s face that has conquered the years,  
 Are not the halls of thy memory haunted places?  
 Cometh there not as a moon (where the blood-rust sears  
 Floors a-flutter of old with silks and laces),  
 Gliding, a ghostly Queen, thro’ a mist of tears?

## II

Proudly here, with a loftier pinnacled splendour,  
 Throned in his northern Athens, what spells remain  
 Still on the marble lips of the Wizard, and render  
 Silent the gazer on glory without a stain!

Here and here, do we whisper, with hearts more tender,  
 Tusitala wandered thro' mist and rain;  
 Rainbow-eyed and frail and gallant and slender,  
 Dreaming of pirate-isles in a jewelled main.

## III

Up the Canongate climbeth, cleft asunder  
 Raggedly here, with a glimpse of the distant sea  
 Flashed through a crumbling alley, a glimpse of wonder,  
 Nay, for the City is throned on Eternity!  
 Hark! from the soaring castle a cannon's thunder  
 Closeth an hour for the world and an æon for me,  
 Gazing at last from the martial heights whereunder  
 Deathless memories roll to an ageless sea.

## IN A RAILWAY CARRIAGE

THREE long isles of sunset-cloud,  
 Poised in an ocean of gold,  
 Fleeted away in the west  
 As the long train southward rolled;

And through the gleam and shade of the panes,  
 While meadow and wood went by,  
 Across the streaming earth  
 We watched the steadfast sky.

Dark before the westward window,  
 Heavy and bloated, rolled  
 The face of a drunken woman  
 Nodding against the gold;

Dark before the infinite glory,  
 With bleared and leering eyes,  
 It stupidly lurched and nodded  
 Against the tender skies.

*What had ye done to her, masters of men,  
That her head be bowed down thus—  
Thus for your golden vespers,  
And deepening angelus?*

Dark, besotted, malignant, vacant,  
Slobbering, wrinkled, old,  
Weary and wickedly smiling,  
She nodded against the gold.

Pitiful, loathsome, maudlin, lonely,  
Her moist, inhuman eyes  
Blinked at the flies on the window,  
And could not see the skies.

As a beast that turns and returns to a mirror  
And will not see its face,  
Her eyes rejected the sunset,  
Her soul lay dead in its place,

Dead in the furrows and folds of her flesh  
As a corpse lies lapped in the shroud;  
Silently floated beside her  
The isles of sunset-cloud.

*What had ye done to her, years upon years,  
That her head should be bowed down thus—  
Thus for your golden vespers,  
And deepening angelus?*

Her nails were blackened and split with labour,  
Her back was heavily bowed;  
Silently floated beside her  
The isles of sunset-cloud.

Over their tapering streaks of lilac,  
In breathless depths afar,  
Bright as the tear of an angel  
Glittered a lonely star.

While the hills and the streams of the world went past us,  
And the long train roared and rolled  
Southward, and dusk was falling,  
She nodded against the gold.

## AN EAST-END COFFEE-STALL

Down the dark alley a ring of orange light  
Glowes. God, what leprous tatters of distress,  
Droppings of misery, rags of Thy loneliness  
Quiver and heave like vermin, out of the night!

Like crippled rats, creeping out of the gloom,  
O Life, for one of thy terrible moments there,  
Lit by the little flickering yellow flare,  
Faces that mock at life and death and doom,

Faces that long, long since have known the worst,  
Faces of women that have seen the child  
Waste in their arms, and strangely, terribly, smiled  
When the dark nipple of death has eased its thirst;

Faces of men that once, though long ago,  
Saw the faint light of hope, though far away,—  
Hope that, at end of some tremendous day,  
They yet might reach some life where tears could flow;

Faces of our humanity, ravaged, white,  
Wrenched with old love, old hate, older despair,  
Steal out of vile filth-dropping dens to stare  
On that wild monstrance of a naphtha light.

They crowd before the stall's bright altar rail,  
Grotesque, and sacred, for that light's brief span,  
And all the shuddering darkness cries, "All hail,  
Daughters and Sons of Man!"

See, see, once more, though all their souls be dead,  
 They hold it up, triumphantly hold it up,  
 They feel, they warm their hands upon the Cup;  
 Their crapulous hands, their claw-like hands break Bread!

See, with lean faces rapturously a-glow  
 For a brief while they dream and munch and drink;  
 Then, one by one, once more, silently slink  
 Back, back into the gulping mist. They go,

One by one, out of the ring of light!  
 They creep, like crippled rats, into the gloom,  
 Into the fogs of life and death and doom,  
 Into the night, the immeasurable night.

## RED OF THE DAWN

## I

THE Dawn peered in with blood-shot eyes  
 Pressed close against the cracked old pane.  
 The garret slept: the slow sad rain  
 Had ceased: grey fogs obscured the skies;  
 But Dawn peered in with haggard eyes.

## II

All as last night? The three-legged chair,  
 The bare walls and the tattered bed,  
 All!—but for those wild flakes of red  
 (And Dawn, perhaps, had splashed them there!)  
 Round the bare walls, the bed, the chair.

## III

Twas here, last night, when winds were loud,  
 A ragged singing-girl, she came  
 Out of the tavern's glare and shame,  
 With some few pence—for she was proud—  
 Came home to sleep, when winds were loud.

## IV

And she sleeps well; for she was tired!  
 That huddled shape beneath the sheet  
   With knees up-drawn, no wind or sleet  
 Can wake her now! Sleep she desired;  
 And she sleeps well, for she was tired.

## V

And there was one that followed her  
   With some unhappy curse called "love":  
   Last night, though winds beat loud above,  
 She shrank! Hark, on the creaking stair,  
   What stealthy footstep followed her?

## VI

But now the Curse, it seemed, had gone!  
   The small tin-box, wherein she hid  
   Old childish treasures, had burst its lid.  
 Dawn kissed her doll's cracked face. It shone  
   Red-smeared, but laughing—*the Curse is gone.*

## VII

So she sleeps well: she does not move;  
   And on the wall, the chair, the bed,  
   Is it the Dawn that splashes red,  
 High as the text where *God is Love*  
   Hangs o'er her head? She does not move.

## VIII

The clock dictates its old refrain:  
   All else is quiet; or, far away,  
   Shaking the world with new-born day,  
 There thunders past some mighty train:  
   The clock dictates its old refrain.

## IX

The Dawn peers in with blood-shot eyes:  
The crust, the broken cup are there!  
She does not rise yet to prepare  
Her scanty meal. God does not rise  
And pluck the blood-stained sheet from her;  
But Dawn peers in with haggard eyes.

## THE DREAM-CHILD'S INVITATION

## I

*Once upon a time!*—Ah, now the light is burning dimly.  
Peterkin is here again: he wants another tale!  
Don't you hear him whispering—*The wind is in the chimley,*  
*The ottoman's a treasure-ship, we'll all set sail?*

## II

All set sail? No, the wind is very loud to-night:  
The darkness on the waters is much deeper than of yore.  
Yet I wonder—hark, he whispers—if the little streets are still  
as bright  
In old Japan, in old Japan, that happy haunted shore.

## III

I wonder—hush, he whispers—if perhaps the world will wake  
again  
When Christmas brings the stories back from where the  
skies are blue,  
Where clouds are scattering diamonds down on every cottage  
window-pane,  
And every boy's a fairy prince, and every tale is true.

## IV

There the sword Excalibur is thrust into the dragon's throat,  
 Evil there is evil, black is black, and white is white:  
 There the child triumphant hurls the villain spluttering into  
 the moat;  
 There the captured princess only waits the peerless knight.

## V

Fairyland is gleaming there beyond the Sherwood Forest  
 trees,  
 There the City of the Clouds has anchored on the plain  
 All her misty vistas and slumber-rosy palaces  
*(Shall we not, ah, shall we not, wander there again?)*

## VI

“Happy ever after” there, the lights of home a welcome fling'  
 Softly thro’ the darkness as the star that shone of old,  
 Softly over Bethlehem and o'er the little cradled King  
 Whom the sages worshipped with their frankincense and  
 gold.

## VII

*Once upon a time*—perhaps a hundred thousand years ago—  
 Whisper to me, Peterkin, I have forgotten when!  
 Once upon a time there was a way, a way we used to know  
 For stealing off at twilight from the weary ways of men.

## VIII

Whisper it, O whisper it—the way, the way is all I need!  
 All the heart and will are here and all the deep desire!  
*Once upon a time*—ah, now the light is drawing near indeed.  
 I see the fairy faces flush to roses round the fire.

## IX

*Once upon a time*—the little lips are on my cheek again,  
Little fairy fingers clasped and clinging draw me nigh,  
Dreams, no more than dreams, but they unloose the weary  
prisoner's chain  
And lead him from his dungeon! “What's a thousand  
years?” they cry.

## X

A thousand years, a thousand years, a little drifting dream ago,  
All of us were hunting with a band of merry men,  
The skies were blue, the boughs were green, the clouds were  
crisping isles of snow . . .  
. . . So Robin blew his bugle, and the Now became the  
Then.

## THE TRAMP TRANFIGURED

(AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF A CORN-FLOWER MILLIONAIRE)

## I

ALL the way to Fairyland across the thyme and heather,  
Round a little bank of fern that rustled on the sky,  
Me and stick and bundle, sir, we jogged along together,—  
(Changeable the weather? Well—it ain't all pie!)  
Just about the sunset—Won't you listen to my story?—  
Look at me! I'm only rags and tatters to your eye!  
Sir, that blooming sunset crowned this battered hat with glory!  
Me that was a crawling worm became a butterfly—  
(Ain't it hot and dry?  
Thank you, sir, thank you, sir!) a blooming butterfly.

## II

Well, it happened this way! I was lying loose and lazy,  
Just as, of a Sunday, you yourself might think no shame,  
Puffing little clouds of smoke, and picking at a daisy,  
Dreaming of your dinner, p'raps, or wishful for the same:

Suddenly, around that ferny bank there slowly waddled—

Slowly as the finger of a clock her shadow came—

Slowly as a tortoise down that winding path she toddled,

Leaning on a crooked staff, a poor old crooked dame,

Limping, but not lame,

*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* a poor old crooked dame.

### III

Slowly did I say, sir? Well, you've heard that funny fable

Consekint the tortoise and the race it give an 'are?

This was curioser than that! At first I wasn't able

Quite to size the memory up that bristled thro' my hair:

Suddenly, I'd got it, with a nasty shivery feeling,

While she walked and walked and yet was not a bit more  
near,—

Sir, it was the tread-mill earth beneath her feet a-wheeling

Faster than her feet could trot to heaven or anywhere,

Earth's revolvin' stair

Wheeling, while my wayside clump was kind of anchored  
there.

### IV

*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* and just a little nearer,

Inch and 'arf an inch she went, but never gained a yard:

Quiet as a fox I lay; I didn't wish to scare 'er,

Watching thro' the ferns, and thinking "What a rum old  
card!"

Both her wrinkled tortoise eyes with yellow resin oozing,

Both her poor old bony hands were red and seamed and  
scarred!

Lord, I felt as if myself was in a public boozing,

While my own old woman went about and scrubbed and  
charred!

Lord, it seemed so hard!

*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* she never gained a yard.

## V

Yus, and there in front of her—I hadn't seen it rightly—  
Lurked that little finger-post to point another road,  
Just a tiny path of poppies twisting infi-nite-ly  
Through the whispering seas of wheat, a scarlet thread that  
showed  
White with ox-eye daisies here and there and chalky cobbles,  
Blue with waving corn-flowers: far and far away it glowed,  
Winding into heaven, I thinks; but, Lord, the way she hobbles,  
Lord, she'll never reach it, for she bears too great a load;  
Yus, and then I knowed,  
If she did, she couldn't, for the board was marked *No Road.*

## VI

*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* I couldn't wait no longer!  
Up I gets and bows polite and pleasant as a toff—  
“Arternoon,” I says, “I’m glad your boots are going stronger;  
Only thing I’m dreading is your feet ‘ull both come off.”  
*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* she didn’t stop to answer,  
“Arternoon,” she says, and sort o’ chokes a little cough,  
“I must get to Piddinhoe to-morrow if I can, sir!”  
“Demme, my good woman! Haw! Don’t think I mean to  
loff,”  
Says I, like a toff,  
“Where d’you mean to sleep to-night? God made this grass  
for go’ff.”

## VII

*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* and smilingly she eyed me  
(Dreadful the low cunning of these creechars, don’t you  
think?)  
“That’s all right! The weather’s bright. Them bushes there  
‘ull hide me.  
Don’t the gorse smell nice?” I felt my derned old eyelids  
blink!

"Supper? I've a crust of bread, a big one, and a bottle,"  
 (Just as I expected! Ah, these creechars always drink!)  
 "Sugar and water and half a pinch of tea to rinse my throttle,  
 Then I'll curl up cosy!"—"If you're cotched it means the  
 clink!"

—“Yus, but don’t you think  
 If a star should see me, God ‘ull tell that star to wink?”

### VIII

"Now, look here," I says, "I don't know what your blooming  
 age is!"

"Three-score years and five," she says, "that's five more  
 years to go

*Tick, tack, tick tack, before I gets my wages!*"

"Wages all be damned," I says, "there's one thing that I  
 know—

Gals that stay out late o' nights are sure to meet wi' sorrow.

Speaking as a toff," I says, "it isn't *comme il faut!*

Tell me why you want to get to Piddinhoe to-morrow?"—

"That was where my son worked, twenty years ago!"—

“Twenty years ago?

Never wrote? May still be there? Remember you?  
 . . . Just so!"

### IX

Yus, it was a drama; but she weren't my long-lost parent!

*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* she trotted all the while,

Never getting forrader, and not the least aware on't,

Though I stood beside her with a sort of silly smile

Stock-still! *Tick, tack!* This blooming world's a bubble:

There I stood and stared at it, mile on flowery mile,

Chasing o' the sunset.—“Gals are sure to meet wi' trouble

Staying out o' nights,” I says, once more, and tries to smile,

“Come, that ain't your style,

Here's a shilling, mother, for to-day I've made my pile!”

## X

Yus, a dozen coppers, all my capital, it fled, sir,  
Representin' twelve bokays that cost me nothink each,  
Twelve bokays o' corn-flowers blue that grew beside my bed,  
sir,

That same day, at sunrise, when the sky was like a peach :  
Easy as a poet's dreams they blossomed round my head, sir,  
All I had to do was just to lift my hand and reach :  
So, upon the roaring waves I cast my blooming bread, sir,  
Bread I'd earned with nose-gays on the bare-foot Brighton  
beach,

Nose-gays and a speech,  
All about the bright blue eyes they matched on Brighton  
beach.

## XI

Still, you've only got to hear the bankers on the budget,  
Then you'll know the giving game is hardly "high finance";  
Which no more it wasn't for that poor old dame to trudge it,  
*Tick, tack, tick, tack*, on such a devil's dance:  
Crumbs, it took me quite aback to see her stop so humble,  
Casting up into my face a sort of shiny glance,  
*Bless you, bless you*, that was what I thought I heard her  
mumble;  
Lord, a prayer for poor old Bill, a rummy sort of chance!  
                Crumbs, that shiny glance  
Kinder made me king of all the sky from here to France.

## XII

*Tick, tack, tick, tack*, but now she toddled faster:  
Soon she'd reach the little twisted by-way through the wheat.  
"Look 'ee here," I says, "young woman, don't you court  
disaster!  
Peepin' through yon poppies there's a cottage trim and neat

White as chalk and sweet as turf: wot price a bed for sorrow,  
 Sprigs of lavender between the pillow and the sheet?"  
 "No," she says, "I've got to get to Piddinhoe to-morrow!  
 P'raps they'd tell the work'us! And I've lashings here to  
 eat:

Don't the gorse smell sweet?" . . .  
 Well, I turned and left her plodding on beside the wheat.

## XIII

Every cent I'd given her like a hero in a story;  
 Yet, alone with leagues of wheat I seemed to grow aware  
 Solomon himself, arrayed in all his golden glory,  
 Couldn't vie with Me, the corn-flower king, the millionaire!  
 How to cash those bright blue cheques that night? My  
 trouser pockets  
 Jingled sudden! Six more pennies, crept from James knew  
 where!  
 Crumbs! I hurried back with eyes just bulging from their  
 sockets,  
 Pushed 'em in the old dame's fist and listened for the prayer,  
 Shamming not to care,  
 Bill—the blarsted chicken-thief, the corn-flower millionaire.

## XIV

*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* and faster yet she clattered!  
 Ay, she'd almost gained a yard! I left her once again.  
 Feeling very warm inside and sort of 'ighly flattered,  
 On I plodded, all alone, with hay-stacks in my brain.  
 Suddenly, with *chink—chink—chink*, the old sweet jingle  
 Startled me! 'TWAS THRU PPENCE MORE! Three coppers  
 round and plain!  
 Lord, temptation struck me and I felt my gullet tingle.  
 Then—I hurried back, beside them seas of golden grain:  
     No, I can't explain;  
 There I thrust 'em in her fist, and left her once again.

## XV

Tinkle-chink! THREE HA'PENCE! If the vulgar fractions followed,

Big fleas have little fleas! It flashed upon me there,—  
Like the snakes of Pharaoh which the snakes of Moses swallowed

All the world was playing at the tortoise and the hare:  
Half the smallest atom is—my soul was getting tipsy—

Heaven is one big circle and the centre's everywhere,  
Yus, and that old woman was an angel and a gipsy,  
Yus, and Bill, the chicken-thief, the corn-flower millionaire,  
Shamming not to care,  
What was he? A seraph on the misty rainbow-stair!

## XVI

Don't you make no doubt of it! The deeper that you look,  
sir,

All your ancient poets tell you just the same as me,—  
What about old Ovid and his most indecent book, sir,  
Morphosizing females into flower and star and tree?  
What about old Proteus and his 'ighly curious 'abits,  
Mixing of his old grey beard into the old grey sea?  
What about old Darwin and the hat that brought forth  
rabbits,  
Mud and slime that growed into the pomp of Ninevey?  
What if there should be  
One great Power beneath it all, one God in you and me?

## XVII

Anyway, it seemed to me I'd struck the world's pump-handle!  
"Back with that three ha'pence, Bill," I mutters, "or  
you're lost."

Back I hurries thro' the dusk where, shining like a candle,  
Pale before the sunset stood that fairy finger-post.  
*Sir, she wasn't there!* I'd struck the place where all roads  
crost,  
All the roads in all the world.

She couldn't yet have trotted  
 Even to the . . . Hist! a stealthy step behind? A  
 ghost?  
*Swish!* A flying noose had caught me round the neck!  
 Garotted!  
 Back I staggered, clutching at the moonbeams, yus, almost  
 Throttled! Sir, I boast  
 Bill is tough, but . . . when it comes to throttling by a  
 ghost!

. . . . .

## XVIII

Winged like a butterfly, tall and slender  
 Out It steps with the rope on its arm.  
 "Crumbs," I says, "all right! I surrender!"  
 When have I crossed you or done you harm?  
*If* you're a sperrit," I says, "O, crikey,  
*If* you're a sperrit, get hence, vamoose!"  
 Sweet as music, she spoke—"I'm Psyche!"—  
 Choking me still with her silken noose.

## XIX

Straight at the word from the ferns and blossoms  
 Fretting the moon-rise over the downs,  
 Little blue wings and little white bosoms,  
 Little white faces with golden crowns  
 Peeped, and the colours came twinkling round me,  
 Laughed, and the turf grew purple with thyme,  
 Danced, and the sweet crushed scents nigh drowned me,  
 Sang, and the hare-bells rang in chime.

## XX

All around me, gliding and gleaming,  
 Fair as a fallen sunset-sky,  
 Butterfly wings came drifting, dreaming,  
 Clouds of the little folk clustered nigh,  
 Little white hands like pearls uplifted  
 Cords of silk in shimmering skeins,  
 Cast them about me and dreamily drifted  
 Winding me round with their soft warm chains.

## XXI

Round and round me they dizzily floated,  
 Binding me faster with every turn:  
 Crumbs, my pals would have grinned and gloated  
 Watching me over that fringe of fern,  
 Bill, with his battered old hat outstanding  
 Black as a foam-swept rock to the moon,  
 Bill, like a rainbow of silks expanding  
 Into a beautiful big cocoon,—

## XXII

Big as a cloud, though his hat still crowned him,  
 Yus, and his old boots bulged below:  
 Seas of colour went shimmering round him,  
 Dancing, glimmering, glancing a-glow!  
 Bill knew well what them elves were at, sir,—  
 Ain't you an en-to-mol-o-gist?  
 Well, despite of his old black hat, sir,  
 Bill was becoming—a chrysalist.

. . . . .

## XXIII

Muffled, smothered in a sea of emerald and opal,  
 Down a dazzling gulf of dreams I sank and sank away,  
 Wound about with twenty thousand yards of silken rope, all  
 Shimmering into crimson, glimmering into grey,  
 Drowsing, waking, living, dying, just as you regards it,  
 Buried in a sunset-cloud, or cloud of breaking day,  
 Cording as from East or West yourself might look towards it,  
 Losing, gaining, lost in darkness, ragged, grimy, gay,  
 'And-cuffed, not to say  
 Gagged, but both my shoulders budding, sprouting white as  
 May.

## XXIV

Sprouting like the milky buds o' hawthorn in the night-time,  
 Pouting like the snowy buds o' roses in July,  
 Spreading in my chrysalist and waiting for the right time,  
 When—I thought—they'd bust to wings and Bill would rise  
 and fly,

*Tick, tack, tick, tack,* as if it came in answer,  
 Sweeping o'er my head again the tide o' dreams went by,—  
*I must get to Piddinhoe to-morrow if I can, sir,*  
*Tick, tack,* a crackle in my chrysalist, a cry!  
 Then the warm blue sky  
 Bust the shell, and out crept Bill—a blooming butterfly!

## XXV

Blue as a corn-flower, blazed the zenith: the deepening East  
 like a scarlet poppy  
 Burned while, dazzled with golden bloom, white clouds like  
 daisies, green seas like wheat,  
 Gripping the sign-post, first, I climbs, to sun my wings, which  
 were wrinkled and floppy,  
 Spreading 'em white o'er the words *No Road*, and hanging  
 fast by my six black feet.

## XXVI

Still on my head was the battered old beaver, but through it  
 my clubbed antennæ slanted,  
 ("Feelers" yourself would probably call 'em) my battered  
 old boots were hardly seen  
 Under the golden fluff of the tail! It was Bill, sir, Bill, though  
 highly enchanted,  
 Spreading his beautiful snow-white pinions, tipped with  
 orange, and veined with green.

## XXVII

Yus, old Bill was an Orange-tip, a spirit in glory, a blooming  
 Psyche!  
 New, it was new from East to West this rummy old world  
 that I dreamed I knew,  
 How can I tell you the things that I saw with my—what shall  
 I call 'em?—"feelers?"—O, crikey,  
 "FEELERS?" You know how the man born blind described  
 such colours as scarlet or blue.

## XXVIII

"Scarlet," he says, "is the sound of a trumpet, blue is a flute,"  
for he hasn't a notion!

No, nor nobody living on earth can tell it him plain, if he  
hasn't the sight!

That's how it stands with ragged old Bill, a-drift and a-dream  
on a measureless ocean,

Gifted wi' fifteen new-born senses, and seeing you blind to  
their new strange light.

## XXIX

How can I tell you? Sir, you must wait, till you die like Bill,  
ere you understand it!

Only—I saw—the same as a bee that strikes to his hive ten  
leagues away—

Straight as a die, while I winked and blinked on that sun-  
warmed wood and my wings expanded

(Whistler drawings that men call wings)—I saw—and I flew  
—that's all I can say.

## XXX

Flew over leagues of whispering wonder, fairy forests and  
flowery palaces,

Love-lorn casements, delicate kingdoms, beautiful flaming  
thoughts of—Him;

Feasts of a million blue-mailed angels lifting their honey-and-  
wine-brimmed chalices,

Throned upon clouds—(which you'd call white clover) down  
to the world's most rosiest rim.

## XXXI

New and new and new and new, the white o' the cliffs and the  
wind in the heather,

Yus, and the sea-gulls flying like flakes of the sea that flashed  
to the new-born day,

Song, song, song, song, quivering up in the wild blue weather,  
Thousands of seraphim singing together, and me just flying  
and—*knowing my way*.

## XXXII

Straight as a die to Piddinhoe's dolphin, and there I drops  
in a cottage garden,  
There, on a sun-warmed window-sill, I winks and peeps, for  
the window was wide!  
Crumbs, he was there and fast in her arms and a-begging his  
poor old mother's pardon,  
There with his lips on her old grey hair, and her head on  
his breast while she laughed and cried,—

## XXXIII

*"One and nine-pence that old tramp gave me, or else I should  
never have reached you, sonny,  
Never, and you just leaving the village to-day and meaning to  
cross the sea,  
One and nine-pence he gave me, I paid for the farmer's lift with  
half o' the money!  
Here's the ten-pence halfpenny, sonny, 'twill pay for our little  
'ouse-warming tea."*

## XXXIV

*Tick, tack, tick, tack, out into the garden  
Toddles that old Fairy with his arm about her—so,  
Cuddling of her still, and still a-begging of her pardon,  
While she says "I wish the corn-flower king could only  
know!  
Bless him, bless him, once again," she says and softly gazes  
Up to heaven, a-smiling in her mutch as white as snow,  
All among her gilly-flowers and stocks and double daisies,  
Mignonette, forget-me-not, . . . Twenty years ago,  
All a rosy glow,  
This is how it was, she said, Twenty years ago.*

## XXXV

Once again I seemed to wake, the vision it had fled, sir,  
 There I lay upon the downs: the sky was like a peach;  
 Yus, with twelve bokays of corn-flowers blue beside my bed,  
     sir,  
 More than usual 'andsome, so they'd bring me two-pence  
     each.  
 Easy as a poet's dreams they blossomed round my head, sir,  
     All I had to do was just to lift my hand and reach,  
 Tie 'em with a bit of string, and earn my blooming bread,  
     sir,  
 Selling little nose-gays on the bare-foot Brighton beach,  
     Nose-gays and a speech,  
 All about the bright blue eyes they matched on Brighton  
     beach.

## XXXVI

Overhead the singing lark and underfoot the heather,  
 Far and blue in front of us the unplumbed sky,  
 Me and stick and bundle, O, we jogs along together,  
     (Changeable the weather? Well, it ain't all pie!)  
 Weather's like a woman, sir, and if she wants to quarrel,  
     If her eyes begin to flash and hair begins to fly,  
 You've to wait a little, then—the story has a moral—  
     Ain't the sunny kisses all the sweeter by and bye?  
         (Crumbs, it's 'ot and dry!  
 Thank you, sir! Thank you, sir!) the sweeter by and bye.

## XXXVII

So the world's my sweetheart and I sort of want to squeeze 'er.  
 Toffs 'ull get no chance of heaven, take 'em in the lump!  
 Never laid in hay-fields when the dawn came over-sea, sir?  
     Guess it's true that story 'bout the needle and the hump!

Never crept into a stack because the wind was blowing,  
 Hollered out a nest and closed the door-way with a clump,  
 Laid and heard the whisper of the silence, growing, growing,  
 Watched a thousand wheeling stars and wondered if they'd  
 bump?

What I say would stump  
 Joshua! But I've done it, sir. Don't think I'm off my  
 chump.

## XXXVIII

If you try and lay, sir, with your face turned up to wonder,  
 Up to twenty million miles of stars that roll like one,  
 Right across to God knows where, and you just huddled under  
 Like a little beetle with no business of his own,  
 There you'd hear—like growing grass—a funny silent sound,  
 sir,  
 Mixed with curious crackles in a steady undertone,  
 Just the sound of twenty billion stars a-going round, sir,  
 Yus, and you beneath 'em like a wise old ant, alone,  
 Ant upon a stone,  
 Waving of his antlers, on the Sussex downs, alone.

## ON THE DOWNS

WIDE-EYED our childhood roamed the world  
 Knee-deep in blowing grass,  
 And watched the white clouds crisply curled  
 Above the mountain-pass,  
 And lay among the purple thyme  
 And from its fragrance caught  
 Strange hints from some elusive clime  
 Beyond the bounds of thought.

Glimpses of fair forgotten things  
 Beyond the gates of birth,  
 Half-caught from far off ancient springs  
 In heaven, and half of earth;

And coloured like a fairy-tale  
And whispering evermore  
Half memories from the half-fenced pale  
Of lives we lived before.

Here, weary of the roaring town  
A-while may I return  
And while the west wind roams the down  
Lie still, lie still and learn:  
Here are green leagues of murmuring wheat  
With blue skies overhead,  
And, all around, the winds are sweet  
With May-bloom, white and red.

And, to and fro, the bee still hums  
His low unchanging song,  
And the same rustling whisper comes  
As through the ages long:  
Through all the thousands of the years  
That same sweet rumour flows,  
With dreaming skies and gleaming tears  
And kisses and the rose.

Once more the children throng the lanes,  
Themselves like flowers, to weave  
Their garlands and their daisy-chains  
And listen and believe  
The tale of *Once-upon-a-time*,  
And hear the *Long-ago*  
And *Happy-ever-after* chime  
Because it must be so.

And by those thousands of the years  
It is, though scarce we see,  
Dazed with the rainbows of our tears,  
Their steadfast unity,  
It is, or life's disjointed schemes,  
These stones, these ferns unfurled  
With such deep care—a madman's dreams  
Were wisdom to this world!

Dust into dust! Lie still and learn,  
 Hear how the ages sing  
 The solemn joy of our return  
 To that which makes the Spring:  
 Even as we came, with childhood's trust,  
 Wide-eyed we go, to Thee  
 Who holdest in Thy sacred dust  
 The heavenly Springs to be.

## A MAY-DAY CAROL

WHAT is the loveliest light that Spring  
 Rosily parting her robe of grey  
 Girdled with leaflet green, can fling  
 Over the fields where her white feet stray?  
 What is the merriest promise of May  
 Flung o'er the dew-drenched April flowers?  
 Tell me, you on the pear-tree spray—  
*Carol of birds between the showers.*

What can life at its lightest bring  
 Better than this on its brightest day?  
 How should we fetter the white-throat's wing  
 Wild with joy of its woodland way?  
 Sweet, should love for an hour delay,  
 Swift, while the primrose-time is ours!  
 What is the lover's royallest lay?—  
*Carol of birds between the showers.*

What is the murmur of bees a-swing?  
 What is the laugh of a child at play?  
 What is the song that the angels sing?  
 (Where were the tune could the sweet notes stay  
 Longer than this, to kiss and betray?)  
 Nay, on the blue sky's topmost towers,  
 What is the song of the seraphim? Say—  
*Carol of birds between the showers.*

Thread the stars on a silver string,  
(So did they sing in Bethlehem's bowers!)  
Mirth for a little one, grief for a king,  
*Carol of birds between the showers.*

### THE CALL OF THE SPRING

COME, choose your road and away, my lad,  
Come, choose your road and away!  
We'll out of the town by the road's bright crown  
As it dips to the dazzling day.  
It's a long white road for the weary;  
But it rolls through the heart of the May.

Though many a road would merrily ring  
To the tramp of your marching feet,  
All roads are one from the day that's done,  
And the miles are swift and sweet,  
And the graves of your friends are the mile-stones  
To the land where all roads meet.

But the call that you hear this day, my lad,  
Is the Spring's old bugle of mirth  
When the year's green fire in a soul's desire  
Is brought like a rose to the birth;  
And knights ride out to adventure  
As the flowers break out of the earth.

Over the sweet-smelling mountain-passes  
The clouds lie brightly curled;  
The wild-flowers cling to the crags and swing  
With cataract-dews impearled;  
And the way, the way that you choose this day  
Is the way to the end of the world.

It rolls from the golden long ago  
To the land that we ne'er shall find;  
And it's uphill here, but it's downhill there,  
For the road is wise and kind,  
And all rough places and cheerless faces  
Will soon be left behind.

Come, choose your road and away, away,  
We'll follow the gipsy sun;  
For it's soon, too soon to the end of the day,  
And the day is well begun;  
And the road rolls on through the heart of the May,  
And there's never a May but one.

There's a fir-wood here, and a dog-rose there,  
And a note of the mating dove;  
And a glimpse, maybe, of the warm blue sea,  
And the warm white clouds above;  
And warm to your breast in a tenderer nest  
Your sweetheart's little glove.

There's not much better to win, my lad,  
There's not much better to win!  
You have lived, you have loved, you have fought, you  
have proved  
The worth of folly and sin;  
So now come out of the City's rout,  
Come out of the dust and the din.

Come out,—a bundle and stick is all  
You'll need to carry along,  
If your heart can carry a kindly word,  
And your lips can carry a song;  
You may leave the lave to the keep o' the grave,  
If your lips can carry a song!

*Come, choose your road and away, my lad,*  
*Come, choose your road and away!*  
*We'll out of the town by the road's bright crown,*  
*As it dips to the sapphire day!*  
*All roads may meet at the world's end,*  
*But, hey for the heart of the May!*  
*Come, choose your road and away, dear lad,*  
*Come choose your road and away.*

## A DEVONSHIRE DITTY

## I

IN a leafy lane of Devon  
 There's a cottage that I know,  
 Then a garden—then, a grey old crumbling wall,  
 And the wall's the wall of heaven  
 (Where I hardly care to go)  
 And there isn't any fiery sword at all.

## II

But I never went to heaven.  
 There was right good reason why,  
 For they sent a shining angel to me there  
 An angel, down in Devon,  
 (Clad in muslin by the bye)  
 With the halo of the sunshine on her hair.

## III

Ah, whate'er the darkness covers,  
 And whate'er we sing or say,  
 Would you climb the wall of heaven an hour too  
 soon  
 If you knew a place for lovers  
 Where the apple-blossoms stray  
 Out of heaven to sway and whisper to the moon?

## IV

When we die—we'll think of Devon  
 Where the garden's all aglow  
 With the flowers that stray across the grey old  
 wall:  
 Then we'll climb it, out of heaven,  
 From the other side, you know,  
 Straggle over it from heaven  
 With the apple-blossom snow,  
 Tumble back again to Devon  
 Laugh and love as long ago,  
 Where there isn't any fiery sword at all.

## BACCHUS AND THE PIRATES

Half a hundred terrible pig-tails, pirates famous in song and story,  
 Hoisting the old black flag once more, in a palmy harbour of Caribbee,  
 "Farewell" we waved to our brown-skinned lasses, and chorus-sing out to the billows of glory,  
 Billows a-glitter with rum and gold, we followed the sunset over the sea.

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
 Our capstan song we sung:  
 Half a hundred broad-sheet pirates  
 When the world was young!*

Sea-roads plated with pieces of eight that rolled to a heaven by rum made mellow,  
 Heaved and coloured our barque's black nose where the Lascar sang to a twinkling star,  
 And the tangled bow-sprit plunged and dipped its point in the west's wild red and yellow,  
 Till the curved white moon crept out astern like a naked knife from a blue cymar.

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
 Our capstan song we sung:  
 Half a hundred terrible pirates  
 When the world was young!*

Half a hundred tarry pig-tails, Teach, the chewer of glass, had taught us,  
 Taught us to balance the plank ye walk, your little plank-bridge to Kingdom Come:  
 Half a score had sailed with Flint, and a dozen or so the devil had brought us  
 Back from the pit where Blackbeard lay, in Beelzebub's bosom, a-screech for rum.

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
Our capstan song we sung:  
Half a hundred piping pirates  
When the world was young!*

There was Captain Hook (of whom ye have heard—so called  
from his terrible cold steel twister,  
His own right hand having gone to a shark with a taste for  
skippers on pirate-trips),  
There was Silver himself, with his cruel crutch, and the blind  
man Pew, with a phiz like a blister,  
Gouged and white and dreadfully dried in the reek of a  
thousand burning ships.

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
Our capstan song we sung:  
Half a hundred cut-throat pirates  
When the world was young!*

With our silver buckles and French cocked hats and our  
skirted coats (they were growing greener,  
But green and gold look well when spliced! We'd trimmed  
'em up wi' some fine fresh lace)  
Bravely over the seas we danced to the horn-pipe tune of a  
concertina,  
Cutlasses jetting beneath our skirts and cambric handker-  
chiefs all in place.

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
Our capstan song we sung:  
Half a hundred elegant pirates  
When the world was young!*

And our black prow grated, one golden noon, on the happiest  
isle of the Happy Islands,  
An isle of Paradise, fair as a gem, on the sparkling breast  
of the wine-dark deep,  
An isle of blossom and yellow sand, and enchanted vines on  
the purple highlands,  
Wi' grapes like melons, nay clustering suns, a-sprawl over  
cliffs in their noonday sleep.

*While earth goes round let rum go round,  
Our capstan song we sung:  
Half a hundred dream-struck pirates  
When the world was young!*

And lo! on the soft warm edge of the sand, where the sea like  
wine in a golden noggin  
Creamed, and the rainbow-bubbles clung to his flame-red  
hair, a white youth lay,  
Sleeping; and now, as his drowsy grip relaxed, the cup that  
he squeezed his grog in  
Slipped from his hand and its purple dregs were mixed with  
the flames and flakes of spray.

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
Our capstan song we sung:  
Half a hundred diffident pirates  
When the world was young!*

And we suddenly saw (had we seen them before? They were  
coloured like sand or the pelt on his shoulders)  
His head was pillow'd on two great leopards, whose breathing  
rose and sank with his own;  
Now a pirate is bold, but the vision was rum and would call  
for rum in the best of beholders,  
And it seemed we had seen Him before, in a dream, with  
that flame-red hair and that vine-leaf crown.

*And the earth went round, and the rum went round,  
And softlier now we sung:  
Half a hundred awe-struck pirates  
When the world was young!*

Now Timothy Hook (of whom ye have heard, with his talon of  
steel) our doughty skipper,  
A man that, in youth being brought up pious, had many a  
book on his cabin-shelf,  
Suddenly caught at a comrade's hand with the tearing claws of  
his cold steel flipper  
And cried, "Great Thunder and Brimstone, boys, I've hit it  
at last! 'Tis Bacchus himself."

*And the earth went round, and the rum went round,  
And never a word we sung:  
Half a hundred tottering pirates  
When the world was young!*

He flung his French cocked hat i' the foam (though its lace was  
the best of his wearing apparel):

We stared at him—Bacchus! The sea reeled round like a wine-  
vat splashing with purple dreams,  
And the sunset-skies were dashed with blood of the grape as  
the sun like a new-staved barrel  
Flooded the tumbling West with wine and spattered the  
clouds with crimson gleams.

*And the earth went round, and our heads went round,  
And never a word we sung:  
Half a hundred staggering pirates  
When the world was young!*

Down to the ship for a fishing-net our crafty Hook sent Silver  
leaping;

Back he came on his pounding crutch, for all the world like  
a kangaroo;

And we caught the net and up to the Sleeper on hands and knees  
we all went creeping,

Flung it across him and staked it down! 'Twas the best of  
our dreams and the dream was true.

*And the earth went round, and the rum went round,  
And loudly now we sung:  
Half a hundred jubilant pirates  
When the world was young!*

We had caught our god, and we got him aboard ere he woke  
(he was more than a little heavy);

Glittering, beautiful, flushed he lay in the lurching bows of  
the old black barque,

As the sunset died and the white moon dawned, and we saw  
on the island a star-bright bevy

Of naked Bacchanals stealing to watch through the whisper-  
ing vines in the purple dark!

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
Our capstan song we sung:  
Half a hundred innocent pirates  
When the world was young!*

Beautiful under the sailing moon, in the tangled net, with the leopards beside him,  
Snared like a wild young red-lipped merman, wilful, petulant, flushed he lay;  
While Silver and Hook in their big sea-boots and their boat-cloaks guarded and gleefully eyed him,  
Thinking what Bacchus might do for a seaman, like standing him drinks, as a man might say.

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
We sailed away and sung:  
Half a hundred fanciful pirates  
When the world was young!*

All the grog that ever was heard of, gods, was it stowed in our sure possession?  
O, the pictures that broached the skies and poured their colours across our dreams!  
O, the thoughts that tapped the sunset, and rolled like a great torchlight procession  
Down our throats in a glory of glories, a roaring splendour of golden streams!

*And the earth went round, and the stars went round,  
As we hauled the sheets and sung:  
Half a hundred infinite pirates  
When the world was young!*

Beautiful, white, at the break of day, He woke and, the net in a smoke dissolving,  
He rose like a flame, with his yellow-eyed pards and his flame-red hair like a windy dawn,  
And the crew kept back, respectful like, till the leopards advanced with their eyes revolving,  
Then up the rigging went Silver and Hook, and the rest of us followed with case-knives drawn.

*While earth goes round, let rum go round,  
Our cross-tree song we sung:  
Half a hundred terrified pirates  
When the world was young!*

And "Take me home to my happy island!" he says. "Not I," sings Hook, "by thunder; We'll take you home to a happier isle, our palmy harbour of Caribbee!" "You won't!" says Bacchus, and quick as a dream the planks of the deck just heaved asunder, And a mighty Vine came straggling up that grew from the depths of the wine-dark sea.

*And the sea went round, and the skies went round,  
As our cross-tree song we sung:  
Half a hundred horrified pirates  
When the world was young!*

We were anchored fast as an oak on land, and the branches clutched and the tendrils quickened, And bound us writhing like snakes to the spars! Ay, we hacked with our knives at the boughs in vain, And Bacchus laughed loud on the decks below, as ever the tough sprays tightened and thickened, And the blazing hours went by, and we gaped with thirst and our ribs were racked with pain

*And the skies went round, and the sea swam round,  
And we knew not what we sung:  
Half a hundred lunatic pirates  
When the world was young!*

Bunch upon bunch of sunlike grapes, as we writhed and struggled and raved and strangled, Bunch upon bunch of gold and purple daubed its bloom on our baked black lips. Clustering grapes, O, bigger than pumpkins, just out of reach they bobbed and dangled Over the vine-entangled sails of that most dumbfounded of pirate ships!

*And the sun went round, and the moon came round,  
And mocked us where we hung:  
Half a hundred maniac pirates  
When the world was young!*

Over the waters the white moon winked its bruised old eye at our bowery prison,  
When suddenly we were aware of a light such as never a moon or a ship's lamp throws,  
And a shallop of pearl, like a Nautilus shell, came shimmering up as by magic arisen,  
With sails of silk and a glory around it that turned the sea to a rippling rose.

*And our heads went round, and the stars went round,  
At the song that cruiser sung:  
Half a hundred goggle-eyed pirates  
When the world was young!*

Half a hundred rose-white Bacchanals hauled the ropes of that rosy cruiser!  
Over the seas they came and laid their little white hands on the old black barque;  
And Bacchus he ups and he steps aboard: "Hi, stop!" cries Hook, "you frantic old boozier!  
Belay, below there, don't you go and leave poor pirates to die in the dark!"

*And the moon went round, and the stars went round,  
As they all pushed off and sung:  
Half a hundred ribbonless Bacchanals  
When the world was young!*

Over the seas they went and Bacchus he stands, with his yellow-eyed leopards beside him,  
High on the poop of rose and pearl, and kisses his hand to us, pleasant as pie!  
While the Bacchanals danced to their tambourines, and the vine-leaves flew, and Hook just eyed him  
Once, as a man that was brought up pious, and scornfully hollers, "Well, you ain't shy!"

*For all around him, vine-leaf crowned,  
The wild white Bacchanals flung!  
Nor it wasn't a sight for respectable pirates  
When the world was young!*

All around that rainbow-Nautilus rippled the bloom of a thousand roses,  
Nay, but the sparkle of fairy sea-nymphs breasting a fairy-like sea of wine,  
Swimming around it in murmuring thousands, with white arms tossing; till—all that we knows is  
The light went out, and the night was dark, and the grapes had burst and their juice was—brine!

*And the vines that bound our bodies round  
Were plain wet ropes that clung,  
Squeezing the light out o' fifty pirates  
When the world was young!*

Over the seas in the pomp of dawn a king's ship came with her proud flag flying.  
Cloud upon cloud we watched her tower with her belts and her crowded zones of sail;  
And an A.B. perched in a white crow's nest, with a brass-rimmed spy-glass quietly spying,  
As we swallowed the lumps in our choking throats and uttered our last faint feeble hail!

*And our heads went round as the ship went round,  
And we thought how coves had swung:  
All for playing at broad-sheet pirates  
When the world was young!*

Half a hundred trembling corsairs, all cut loose, but a trifle giddy,  
We lands on their trim white decks at last and the bo'sun he whistles us good hot grog,  
And we tries to confess, but there wasn't a soul from the Admiral's self to the gold-laced middy  
But says, "They're delirious still, poor chaps," and the Cap'n he enters the fact in his log,

*That his boat's crew found us nearly drowned  
 In a barrel without a bung—  
 Half a hundred suffering sea-cooks  
 When the world was young!*

So we sailed by Execution Dock, where the swinging pirates  
 haughty and scornful  
 Rattled their chains, and on Margate beach we came like  
 a school-treat safe to land;  
 And one of us took to religion at once; and the rest of the crew,  
 tho' their hearts were mournful,  
 Capered about as Christy Minstrels, while Hook conducted  
 the big brass band.

*And the sun went round, and the moon went round,  
 And, O, 'twas a thought that stung!  
 There was none to believe we were broad-sheet pirates  
 When the world was young!*

Ah, yet (if ye stand me a noggin of rum) shall the old Blue  
 Dolphin echo the story!  
 We'll hoist the white cross-bones again in our palmy harbour  
 of Caribbee!  
 We'll wave farewell to our brown-skinned lasses and, chorussing  
 out to the billows of glory,  
 Billows a-glitter with rum and gold, we'll follow the sunset  
 over the sea!

*While earth goes round, let rum go round!  
 O, sing it as we sung!  
 Half a hundred terrible pirates  
 When the world was young!*

### THE NEWSPAPER BOY

#### I

ELF of the City, a lean little hollow-eyed boy  
 Ragged and tattered, but lithe as a slip of the Spring,  
 Under the lamp-light he runs with a reckless joy  
 Shouting a murderer's doom or the death of a King.

Out of the darkness he leaps like a wild strange hint,  
 Herald of tragedy, comedy, crime and despair,  
 Waving a poster that hurls you, in fierce black print  
 One word *Mystery*, under the lamp's white glare.

## II

Elf of the night of the City he darts with his crew  
 Out of a vaporous furnace of colour that wreathes  
 Magical letters a-flicker from crimson to blue  
 High overhead. All round him the mad world seethes.  
 Hansoms, like cantering beetles, with diamond eyes  
 Run through the moons of it; busses in yellow and red  
 Hoot; and St. Paul's is a bubble afloat in the skies,  
 Watching the pale moths flit and the dark death's head.

## III

Painted and powdered they shimmer and rustle and stream  
 Westward, the night moths, masks of the Magdalen! See,  
 Puck of the revels, he leaps through the sinister dream  
 Waving his elfin evangel of *Mystery*,  
 Puck of the bubble or dome of their scoffing or trust,  
 Puck of the fairy-like tower with the clock in its face,  
 Puck of an Empire that whirls on a pellet of dust  
 Bearing his elfin device thro' the splendours of space.

## IV

*Mystery*—is it the scribble of doom on the dark,  
 Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin, again?  
*Mystery*—is it a scrap of remembrance, a spark  
 Burning still in the fog of a blind world's brain?  
 Elf of the gossamer tangles of shadow and light,  
 Wild electrical webs and the battle that rolls  
 League upon perishing league thro' the ravenous night,  
 Breaker on perishing breaker of human souls.

## V

Soaked in the colours, a flake of the flying spray  
 Flung over wreckage and yeast of the murderous town,  
 Onward he flaunts it, innocent, vicious and gay,  
 Prophet of prayers that are stifled and loves that drown,  
 Urchin and sprat of the City that roars like a sea  
 Surging around him in hunger and splendour and shame,  
 Cruelty, luxury, madness, he leaps in his glee  
 Out of the mazes of mist and the vistas of flame.

## VI

Ragged and tattered he scurries away in the gloom:  
 Over the thundering traffic a moment his cry  
*Mystery! Mystery!*—reckless of death and doom  
 Rings; and the great wheels roll and the world goes by.  
 Lost, is it lost, that hollow-eyed flash of the light?—  
 Poor little face flying by with the word that saves,  
 Pale little mouth of the mask of the measureless night,  
 Shrilling the heart of it, lost like the foam on its waves!

## THE TWO WORLDS

THIS outer world is but the pictured scroll  
 Of worlds within the soul,  
 A coloured chart, a blazoned missal-book  
 Whereon who rightly look  
 May spell the splendours with their mortal eyes  
 And steer to Paradise.

O, well for him that knows and early knows  
 In his own soul the rose  
 Secretly burgeons, of this earthly flower  
 The heavenly paramour:  
 And all these fairy dreams of green-wood fern,  
 These waves that break and yearn,  
 Shadows and hieroglyphs, hills, clouds and seas,  
 Faces and flowers and trees,  
 Terrestrial picture-parables, relate  
 Each to its heavenly mate.

O, well for him that finds in sky and sea  
    This two-fold mystery,  
And loses not (as painfully he spells  
    The fine-spun syllables)  
The cadences, the burning inner gleam,  
    The poet's heavenly dream.

Well for the poet if this earthly chart  
    Be printed in his heart,  
When to his world of spirit woods and seas  
    With eager face he flees  
And treads the untrodden fields of unknown flowers  
    And threads the angelic bowers,  
And hears that unheard nightingale whose moan  
    Trembles within his own,  
And lovers murmuring in the leafy lanes  
    Of his own joys and pains.

For though he voyages further than the flight  
    Of earthly day and night,  
Traversing to the sky's remotest ends  
    A world that he transcends,  
Safe, he shall hear the hidden breakers roar  
    Against the mystic shore;  
Shall roam the yellow sands where sirens bare  
    Their breasts and wind their hair;  
Shall with their perfumed tresses blind his eyes,  
    And still possess the skies.

He, where the deep unearthly jungles are,  
    Beneath his Eastern star  
Shall pass the tawny lion in his den  
    And cross the quaking fen.  
He learnt his path (and treads it undefiled)  
    When, as a little child,  
He bent his head with long and loving looks  
    O'er earthly picture-books.  
His earthly love nestles against his side,  
    His young celestial guide.

## GORSE

BETWEEN my face and the warm blue sky  
 The crisp white clouds go sailing by,

And the only sound is the sound of your breathing,  
 The song of a bird and the sea's long sigh.

Here, on the downs, as a tale re-told  
 The sprays of the gorse are a-blaze with gold,  
 As of old, on the sea-washed hills of my boyhood,  
 Breathing the same sweet scent as of old.

Under a ragged golden spray  
 The great sea sparkles far away,  
 Beautiful, bright, as my heart remembers  
 Many a dazzle of waves in May.

Long ago as I watched them shine  
 Under the boughs of fir and pine,  
 Here I watch them to-day and wonder,  
 Here, with my love's hand warm in mine.

The soft wings pass that we used to chase,  
 Dreams that I dreamed had left not a trace,  
 The same, the same, with the bars of crimson  
 The green-veined white, with its floating grace,

The same to the least bright fleck on their wings!  
 And I close my eyes, and a lost bird sings,

And a far sea sighs, and the old sweet fragrance  
 Wraps me round with the dear dead springs,

Wraps me round with the springs to be  
 When lovers that think not of you or me

Laugh, but our eyes will be closed in darkness,  
 Closed to the sky and the gorse and the sea,

And the same great glory of ragged gold  
 Once more, once more, as a tale re-told

Shall whisper their hearts with the same sweet fragrance  
 And their warm hands cling, as of old, as of old.

Dead and un-born, the same blue skies  
 Cover us! Love, as I read your eyes,  
     Do I not know whose love enfolds us,  
 As we fold the past in our memories,

Past, present, future, the old and the new?  
 From the depths of the grave a cry breaks through  
     And trembles, a sky-lark blind in the azure,  
 The depths of the all-enfolding blue.

O, resurrection of folded years  
 Deep in our hearts, with your smiles and tears,  
     Dead and un-born shall not He remember  
 Who folds our cry in His heart. and hears.

### FOR THE EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY OF GEORGE MEREDITH

A **HEALTH**, a ringing health, unto the king  
 Of all our hearts to-day! But what proud song  
     Should follow on the thought, nor do him wrong?  
 Except the sea were harp, each mirthful string  
 The lovely lightning of the nights of Spring,  
     And Dawn the lonely listener, glad and grave  
     With colours of the sea-shell and the wave  
 In brightening eye and cheek, there is none to sing!

Drink to him, as men upon an Alpine peak  
 Brim one immortal cup of crimson wine,  
     And into it drop one pure cold crust of snow,  
 Then hold it up, too rapturously to speak  
     And drink—to the mountains, line on glittering line.  
     Surging away into the sunset-glow.

## IN MEMORY OF SWINBURNE

## I

APRIL from shore to shore, from sea to sea,  
 April in heaven and on the springing spray  
 Buoyant with birds that sing to welcome May  
 And April in those eyes that mourn for thee:  
 "This is my singing month; my hawthorn tree  
 Burgeons once more," we seemed to hear thee say,  
 "This is my singing month: my fingers stray  
 Over the lute. What shall the music be?"

And April answered with too great a song  
 For mortal lips to sing or hearts to hear,  
 Heard only of that high invisible throng  
 For whom thy song makes April all the year!  
 "My singing month, what bringest thou?" Her breath  
 Swooned with all music, and she answered—"Death."

## II

Ah, but on earth,—"can'st thou, too, die,"  
 Low she whispers, "lover of mine?"  
 April, queen over earth and sky  
 Whispers, her trembling lashes shine:  
 "Wings of the sea, good-bye, good-bye,  
 Down to the dim sea-line."

Home to the heart of thine old-world lover,  
 Home to thy "fair green-girdled" sea!  
 There shall thy soul with the sea-birds hover,  
 Free of the deep as their wings are free;  
 Free, for the grave-flowers only cover  
 This, the dark cage of thee.

Thee, the storm-bird, nightingale-souled,  
 Brother of Sappho, the seas reclaim!  
 Age upon age have the great waves rolled  
 Mad with her music, exultant, aflame;  
 Thee, thee too, shall their glory enfold,  
 Lit with thy snow-winged fame.

Back, thro' the years, fleets the sea-bird's wing:  
*Sappho, of old time, once,—ah, hark!*  
 So did he love her of old and sing!  
 Listen, he flies to her, back thro' the dark!  
*Sappho, of old time, once. . . . Yea, Spring*  
 Calls him home to her, hark!

*Sappho, long since, in the years far sped,*  
*Sappho, I loved thee! Did I not seem*  
 Fosterling only of earth? I have fled,  
 Fled to thee, sister. Time is a dream!  
 Shelley is here with us! Death lies dead!  
 Ah, how the bright waves gleam.

Wide was the cage-door, idly swinging;  
 April touched me and whispered "Come."  
 Out and away to the great deep winging,  
 Sister, I flashed to thee over the foam,  
 Out to the sea of Eternity, singing  
 "Mother, thy child comes home."

. . . . .  
 Ah, but how shall we welcome May  
 Here where the wing of song droops low,  
 Here by the last green swinging spray  
 Brushed by the sea-bird's wings of snow,  
 We that gazed on his glorious way  
 Out where the great winds blow?

*Here upon earth—"can'st thou, too, die,*  
*Lover of life and lover of mine?"*  
*April, conquering earth and sky*  
*Whispers, her trembling lashes shine:*  
*"Wings of the sea, good-bye, good-bye,*  
*Down to the dim sea-line."*

## ON THE DEATH OF FRANCIS THOMPSON

## I

How grandly glow the bays  
 Purpureally enwound  
 With those rich thorns, the brows  
     How infinitely crowned  
 That now thro' Death's dark house  
     Have passed with royal gaze:  
 Purpureally enwound  
     How grandly glow the bays.

## II

Sweet, sweet and three-fold sweet,  
 Pulsing with three-fold pain,  
 Where the lark fails of flight  
     Soared the celestial strain;  
 Beyond the sapphire height  
     Flew the gold-wingèd feet,  
 Beautiful, pierced with pain,  
     Sweet, sweet and three-fold sweet;

## III

And where *Is not* and *Is*  
     Are wed in one sweet Name,  
 And the world's rootless vine  
     With dew of stars a-flame  
 Laughs, from those deep divine  
     Impossibilities,  
 Our reason all to shame—  
     *This cannot be, but is;*

## IV

Into the Vast, the Deep  
     Beyond all mortal sight,  
 The Nothingness that conceived  
     The worlds of day and night,

The Nothingness that heaved  
    Pure sides in virgin sleep,  
Brought out of Darkness, light;  
    And man from out the Deep.

## V

Into that Mystery  
    Let not thine hand be thrust:  
Nothingness is a world  
    Thy science well may trust . . .  
But lo, a leaf unfurled,  
    Nay, a cry mocking thee  
From the first grain of dust—  
    *I am, yet cannot be!*

## VI

Adventuring un-afraid  
    Into that last deep shrine,  
Must not the child-heart see  
    Its deepest symbol shine,  
The world's Birth-mystery,  
    Whereto the suns are shade?  
Lo, the white breast divine—  
    The holy Mother-maid!

## VII

How miss that Sacrifice,  
    That cross of Yea and Nay,  
That paradox of heaven  
    Whose palms point either way,  
Through each a nail being driven  
    That the arms out-span the skies  
And our earth-dust this day  
    Out-sweeten Paradise.

## VIII

We part the seamless robe,  
 Our wisdom would divide  
 The raiment of the King,  
 Our spear is in His side,  
 Even while the angels sing  
 Around our perishing globe,  
 And Death re-knits in pride  
 The seamless purple robe.

## IX

*How grandly glow the bays  
 Purpureally enwound  
 With those rich thorns, the brows  
 How infinitely crowned  
 That now thro' Death's dark house  
 Have passed with royal gaze:  
 Purpureally enwound  
 How grandly glow the bays.*

## IN MEMORY OF MEREDITH

## I

HIGH on the mountains, who stands proudly, clad with the light of May,  
 Rich as the dawn, deep-hearted as night, diamond-bright as day,  
 Who, while the slopes of the beautiful valley throb with our muffled tread  
 Who, with the hill-flowers wound in her tresses, welcomes our deathless dead?

## II

Is it not she whom he sought so long thro' the high lawns dewy and sweet,  
 Up thro' the crags and the glittering snows faint-flushed with her rosy feet,

Is it not she—the queen of our night—crowned by the unseen sun,  
Artemis, she that can see the light, when light upon earth is none?

## III

Huntress, queen of the dark of the world (no darker at night than noon)  
Beauty immortal and undefiled, the Eternal sun's white moon,  
Only by thee and thy silver shafts for a flash can our hearts discern,  
Pierced to the quick, the love, the love that still thro' the dark doth yearn.

## IV

What to his soul were the hill-flowers, what the gold at the break of day  
Shot thro' the red-stemmed firs to the lake where the swimmer clove his way,  
What were the quivering harmonies showered from the heaven-tossed heart of the lark,  
Artemis, Huntress, what were these but thy keen shafts cleaving the dark?

## V

Frost of the hedge-row, flash of the jasmine, sparkle of dew on the leaf,  
Seas lit wide by the summer lightning, shafts from thy diamond sheaf,  
Deeply they pierced him, deeply he loved thee, now has he found thy soul,  
Artemis, thine, in this bridal peal, where we hear but the death-bell toll.

## THE TESTIMONY OF ART

As earth, sad earth, thrusts many a gloomy cape  
 Into the sea's bright colour and living glee,  
 So do we strive to embay that mystery  
 Which earthly hands must ever let escape;  
 The Word we seek for is the golden shape  
 That shall enshrine the Soul we cannot see,  
 A temporal chalice of Eternity  
 Purple with beating blood of the hallowed grape.

Once was it wine and sacramental bread  
 Whereby we knew the power that through Him smiled  
 When, in one still small utterance, He hurled  
 The Eternities beneath His feet and said  
 With lips, O meek as any little child,  
*Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*

## THE SCHOLARS

WHERE is the scholar whose clear mind can hold  
 The floral text of one sweet April mead?—  
 The flowing lines, which few can spell indeed  
 Though most will note the scarlet and the gold  
 Around the flourishing capitals grandly scrolled;  
 But ah, the subtle cadences that need  
 The lover's heart, the lover's heart to read,  
 And ah, the songs unsung, the tales untold.

Poor fools-capped scholars—grammar keeps us close,  
 The primers thrall us, and our eyes grow dim:  
 When will old Master Science hear the call,  
 Bid us run free with life in every limb  
 To breathe the poems and hear the last red rose  
 Gossiping over God's grey garden-wall?

## RESURRECTION

ONCE more I hear the everlasting sea  
Breathing beneath the mountain's fragrant breast,  
*Come unto Me, come unto Me,*  
*And I will give you rest.*

We have destroyed the Temple and in three days  
He hath rebuilt it—all things are made new:  
And hark what wild throats pour His praise  
Beneath the boundless blue.

We plucked down all His altars, cried aloud  
And gashed ourselves for little gods of clay!  
Yon floating cloud was but a cloud,  
The May no more than May.

We plucked down all His altars, left not one  
Save where, perchance (and ah, the joy was fleet),  
We laid our garlands in the sun  
At the white Sea-born's feet.

We plucked down all His altars, not to make  
The small praise greater, but the great praise less,  
We sealed all fountains where the soul could slake  
Its thirst and weariness.

“Love” was too small, too human to be found  
In that transcendent source whence love was born:  
We talked of “forces”: heaven was crowned  
With philosophic thorn.

“Your God is in your image,” we cried, but O,  
’Twas only man’s own deepest heart ye gave,  
Knowing that He transcended all ye know,  
While we—we dug His grave.

Denied Him even the crown on our own brow,  
E’en these poor symbols of His loftier reign,  
Levelled His Temple with the dust, and now  
He is risen, He is risen again,

Risen, like this resurrection of the year,  
This grand ascension of the choral spring,  
Which those harp-crowded heavens bend to hear  
And meet upon the wing.

"He is dead," we cried, and even amid that gloom  
The wintry veil was rent! The new-born day  
Showed us the Angel seated in the tomb  
And the stone rolled away.

It is the hour! We challenge heaven above  
Now, to deny our slight ephemeral breath  
Joy, anguish, and that everlasting love  
Which triumphs over death.

### A JAPANESE LOVE-SONG

#### I

THE young moon is white,  
But the willows are blue:  
Your small lips are red,  
But the great clouds are grey:  
The waves are so many  
That whisper to you;  
But my love is only  
One flight of spray.

#### II

The bright drops are many,  
The dark wave is one:  
The dark wave subsides,  
And the bright sea remains!  
And wherever, O singing  
Maid, you may run,  
You are one with the world  
For all your pains.

## III

Though the great skies are dark,  
     And your small feet are white,  
 Though your wide eyes are blue  
     And the closed poppies red,  
 Tho' the kisses are many  
     That colour the night,  
 They are linked like pearls  
     On one golden thread.

## IV

Were the grey clouds not made  
     For the red of your mouth;  
 The ages for flight  
     Of the butterfly years;  
 The sweet of the peach  
     For the pale lips of drouth,  
 The sunlight of smiles  
     For the shadow of tears?

## V

Love, Love is the thread  
     That has pierced them with bliss!  
 All their hues are but notes  
     In one world-wide tune:  
 Lips, willows, and waves,  
     We are one as we kiss,  
 And your face and the flowers  
     Faint away in the moon.

## THE TWO PAINTERS

(A TALE OF OLD JAPAN.)

## I

YORICHI TENKO, the painter,  
     Dwelt by the purple sea,  
 Painting the peacock islands  
     Under his willow-tree:

Also in temples he painted  
Dragons of old Japan,  
With a child to look at the pictures—  
Little O Kimi San.

Kimi, the child of his brother,  
Bright as the moon in May,  
White as a lotus lily,  
Pink as a plum-tree spray,  
Linking her soft arm round him  
Sang to his heart for an hour,  
Kissed him with ripples of laughter  
And lips of the cherry flower.

Child of the old pearl-fisher  
Lost in his junk at sea,  
Kimi was loved of Tenko  
As his own child might be,  
Yoichi Tenko the painter,  
Wrinkled and grey and old,  
Teacher of many disciples  
That paid for his dreams with gold.

## II

Peonies, peonies crowned the May!  
Clad in blue and white array  
Came Sawara to the school  
Under the silvery willow-tree,  
All to learn of Tenko!  
Riding on a milk-white mule,  
Young and poor and proud was he,  
Lissom as a cherry spray  
(Peonies, peonies, crowned the day!)  
And he rode the golden way  
To the school of Tenko.

Swift to learn, beneath his hand  
 Soon he watched his wonderland  
     Growing cloud by magic cloud,  
 Under the silvery willow-tree  
     In the school of Tenko:  
 Kimi watched him, young and proud,  
     Painting by the purple sea,  
 Lying on the golden sand  
 Watched his golden wings expand!  
 (None but Love will understand  
     All she hid from Tenko.)

He could paint her tree and flower,  
 Sea and spray and wizard's tower,  
     With one stroke, now hard, now soft,  
 Under the silvery willow-tree  
     In the school of Tenko:  
 He could fling a bird aloft,  
     Splash a dragon in the sea,  
 Crown a princess in her bower,  
 With one stroke of magic power;  
 And she watched him, hour by hour,  
     In the school of Tenko.

Yoichi Tenko, wondering, scanned  
 All the work of that young hand,  
     Gazed his kakemonos o'er,  
 Under the silvery willow-tree  
     In the school of Tenko:  
 "I can teach you nothing more,  
     Thought or craft or mystery;  
 Let your golden wings expand,  
 They will shadow half the land,  
 All the world's at your command,  
     Come no more to Tenko."

*Lying on the golden sand,*  
*Kimi watched his wings expand;*  
*Wept.—He could not understand*  
*Why she wept, said Tenko.*

## III

So, in her blue kimono,  
 Pale as the sickle moon  
 Glimmered thro' soft plum-branches  
 Blue in the dusk of June,  
 Stole she, willing and waning,  
 Frightened and unafraid,—  
 "Take me with you, Sawara,  
 Over the sea," she said.

Small and sadly beseeching,  
 Under the willow-tree,  
 Glimmered her face like a foam-flake  
 Drifting over the sea:  
 Pale as a drifting blossom,  
 Lifted her face to his eyes:  
 Slowly he gathered and held her  
 Under the drifting skies.

Poor little face cast backward,  
 Better to see his own,  
 Earth and heaven went past them  
 Drifting: they two, alone  
 Stood, immortal. He whispered—  
 "Nothing can part us two!"  
 Backward her sad little face went  
 Drifting, and dreamed it true.

"Others are happy," she murmured,  
 "Maidens and men I have seen;  
 You are my king, Sawara,  
 O, let me be your queen!  
 If I am all too lowly,"  
 Sadly she strove to smile,  
 "Let me follow your footsteps,  
 Your slave for a little while."

Surely, he thought, I have painted  
 Nothing so fair as this  
 Moonlit almond blossom  
 Sweet to fold and kiss,

Brow that is filled with music,  
 Shell of a faery sea,  
 Eyes like the holy violets  
 Brimmed with dew for me.

“Wait for Sawara,” he whispered,  
 “Does not his whole heart yearn  
 Now to his moon-bright maiden?  
 Wait, for he will return  
 Rich as the wave on the moon’s path  
 Rushing to claim his bride!”  
 So they plighted their promise,  
 And the ebbing sea-wave sighed.

## IV

Moon and flower and butterfly,  
 Earth and heaven went drifting by,  
 Three long years while Kimi dreamed  
 Under the silvery willow-tree  
 In the school of Tenko,  
 Steadfast while the whole world streamed  
 Past her tow’rds Eternity;  
 Steadfast till with one great cry,  
 Ringing to the gods on high,  
 Golden wings should blind the sky  
 And bring him back to Tenko.

Three long years and nought to say  
 “Sweet, I come the golden way,  
 Riding royally to the school  
 Under the silvery willow-tree  
 Claim my bride of Tenko;  
 Silver bells on a milk-white mule,  
 Rose-red sails on an emerald sea!” . . .  
 Kimi sometimes went to pray  
 In the temple nigh the bay,  
 Dreamed all night and gazed all day  
 Over the sea from Tenko.

Far away his growing fame  
 Lit the clouds. No message came  
     From the sky, whereon she gazed  
 Under the silvery willow-tree  
     Far away from Tenko!  
 Small white hands in the temple raised  
     Pleaded with the Mystery,—  
 “Stick of incense in the flame,  
 Though my love forget my name,  
 Help him, bless him, all the same,  
 And . . . bring him back to Tenko!”

*Rose-white temple nigh the bay,  
 Hush! for Kimi comes to pray,  
 Dream all night and gaze all day  
 Over the sea from Tenko.*

## V

So, when the rich young merchant  
     Showed him his bags of gold,  
 Yoichi Tenko, the painter,  
     Gave him her hand to hold,  
 Said: “You shall wed him, O Kimi.”  
     Softly he lied and smiled—  
 “Yea, for Sawara is wedded!  
     Let him not mock you, child.”

Dumbly she turned and left them,  
     Never a word or cry  
 Broke from her lips’ grey petals  
     Under the drifting sky:  
 Down to the spray and the rainbows,  
     Where she had watched him of old  
 Painting the rose-red islands,  
     Painting the sand’s wet gold,

Down to their dreams of the sunset,  
     Frail as a flower’s white ghost,  
 Lonely and lost she wandered  
     Down to the darkening coast.

Lost in the drifting midnight,  
Weeping, desolate, blind.  
Many went out to seek her:  
Never a heart could find.

Yoichi Tenko, the painter,  
Plucked from his willow-tree  
Two big paper lanterns  
And ran to the brink of the sea;  
Over his head he held them,  
Crying, and only heard,  
Somewhere, out in the darkness,  
The cry of a wandering bird.

## VI

Peonies, peonies thronged the May  
When in royal-rich array  
Came Sawara to the school  
Under the silvery willow-tree—  
To the school of Tenko!  
Silver bells on a milk-white mule,  
Rose-red sails on an emerald sea!  
Over the bloom of the cherry spray,  
Peonies, peonies dimmed the day;  
And he rode the royal way  
Back to Yoichi Tenko.

Yoichi Tenko, half afraid,  
Whispered, "Wed some other maid;  
Kimi left me all alone  
Under the silvery willow-tree,  
Left me," whispered Tenko,  
"Kimi had a heart of stone!"—  
"Kimi, Kimi? Who is she?  
Kimi? Ah—the child that played  
Round the willow-tree. She prayed  
Often; and, whate'er I said,  
She believed it, Tenko."

He had come to paint anew  
 Those dim isles of rose and blue,  
     For a palace far away,  
 Under the silvery willow-tree—  
     So he said to Tenko;  
 And he painted, day by day,  
     Golden visions of the sea.  
 No, he had not come to woo;  
 Yet, had Kimi proven true,  
 Doubtless he had loved her too,  
     Hardly less than Tenko.

Since the thought was in his head,  
 He would make his choice and wed;  
     And a lovely maid he chose  
 Under the silvery willow-tree.  
     “Fairer far,” said Tenko.  
 “Kimi had a twisted nose,  
     And a foot too small, for me,  
 And her face was dull as lead!”  
     “Nay, a flower, be it white or red,  
 Is a flower,” Sawara said!  
     “So it is,” said Tenko.

## VII

Great Sawara, the painter,  
 Sought, on a day of days,  
 One of the peacock islands  
     Out in the sunset haze:  
 Rose-red sails on the water  
     Carried him quickly nigh;  
 There would he paint him a wonder  
     Worthy of Hokusai.

Lo, as he leapt o'er the creaming  
 Roses of faery foam,  
 Out of the green-lipped caverns  
     Under the isle's blue dome,

White as a drifting snow-flake,  
White as the moon's white flame,  
White as a ghost from the darkness,  
Little O Kimi came.

"Long I have waited, Sawara,  
Here in our sunset isle,  
Sawara, Sawara, Sawara,  
Look on me once, and smile;  
Face I have watched so long for,  
Hands I have longed to hold,  
Sawara, Sawara, Sawara,  
Why is your heart so cold?"

Surely, he thought, I have painted  
Nothing so fair as this  
Moonlit almond blossom  
Sweet to fold and kiss. . . .  
"Kimi," he said, "I am wedded!  
Hush, for it could not be!"  
"Kiss me one kiss," she whispered,  
"Me also, even me."

Small and terribly drifting  
Backward, her sad white face  
Lifted up to Sawara  
Once, in that lonely place,  
White as a drifting blossom  
Under his wondering eyes,  
Slowly he gathered and held her  
Under the drifting skies.

"Others are happy," she whispered,  
"Maidens and men I have seen:  
Be happy, be happy, Sawara!  
The other—shall be—your queen!  
Kiss me one kiss for parting."  
Trembling she lifted her head,  
Then like a broken blossom  
It fell on his arm. She was dead.

## VIII

Much impressed, Sawara straight  
 (Though the hour was growing late)  
     Made a sketch of Kimi lying  
 By the lonely, sighing sea,  
     Brought it back to Tenko.  
 Tenko looked it over crying  
     (Under the silvery willow-tree).  
 "You have burst the golden gate!  
 You have conquered Time and Fate!  
 Hokusai is not so great!  
     This is Art," said Tenko!

## THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

## I

## I REMEMBER—

a breath, a breath  
 Blown thro' the rosy gates of birth,  
 A morning freshness not of the earth  
 But cool and strange and lovely as death  
     In Paradise, in Paradise,  
 When, all to suffer the old sweet pain  
     Closing his immortal eyes  
     Wonder-wild an angel lies  
 With wings of rainbow-tinctured grain  
     Withering till—ah, wonder-wild,  
 Here on the dawning earth again  
     He wakes, a little child.

## II

## I remember—

a gleam, a gleam  
 Of sparkling waves and warm blue sky  
 Far away and long ago,  
     Or ever I knew that youth could die;  
 And out of the dawn, the dawn, the dawn,  
 Into the unknown life we sailed  
     As out of sleep into a dream,  
 And, as with elfin cables drawn

In dusk of purple over the glowing  
Wrinkled measureless emerald sea,  
The light cloud shadows larger far  
Than the sweet shapes which drew them on,  
Elfin exquisite shadows flowing  
Between us and the morning star  
Chased us all a summer's day,  
And our sail like a dew-lit blossom shone  
Till, over a rainbow haze of spray  
That arched a reef of surf like snow

—Far away and long ago—

We saw the sky-line rosily engrailed  
With tufted peaks above a smooth lagoon  
Which growing, growing, growing as we sailed  
Curved all around them like a crescent moon;  
And then we saw the purple-shadowed creeks,  
The feathery palms, the gleaming golden streaks  
Of sand, and nearer yet, like jewels of fire  
Streaming between the boughs, or floating higher  
Like tiny sunset-clouds in noon-day skies,

The birds of Paradise.

### III

The island floated in the air,  
Its image floated in the sea:  
Which was the shadow? Both were fair:  
Like sister souls they seemed to be;  
And one was dreaming and asleep,  
And one bent down from Paradise  
To kiss with radiance in the deep  
The darkling lips and eyes.

And, mingling softly in their dreams,  
That holy kiss of sea and sky  
Transfused the shadows and the gleams  
Of Time and of Eternity:  
The dusky face looked up and gave  
To heaven its golden shadowed calm;  
The face of light fulfilled the wave  
With blissful wings and fans of palm.

Above, the tufted rosy peaks  
That melted in the warm blue skies,  
Below, the purple-shadowed creeks  
That glassed the birds of Paradise—  
A bridal knot, it hung in heaven;  
And, all around, the still lagoon  
From bloom of dawn to blush of even  
Curved like a crescent moon.

And there we wandered evermore  
Thro' boyhood's everlasting years,  
Listening the murmur of the shore  
As one that lifts a shell and hears  
The murmur of forgotten seas  
Around some lost Broceliande,  
The sigh of sweet Eternities  
That turn the world to fairy-land,

That turned our isle to a single pearl  
Glowing in measureless waves of wine!  
Above, below, the clouds would curl,  
Above, below, the stars would shine  
In sky and sea. We hung in heaven!  
Time and space were but elfin-sweet  
Rock-bound pools for the dawn and even  
To wade with their rosy feet.

Our pirate cavern faced the West:  
We closed its door with screens of palm,  
While some went out to seek the nest  
Wherein the Phoenix, breathing balm,  
Burns and dies to live for ever  
(How should we dream we lived to die?)  
And some would fish in the purple river  
That thro' the hills brought down the sky.

And some would dive in the lagoon  
Like sunbeams, and all round our isle  
Swim thro' the lovely crescent moon,  
Glimpsing, for breathless mile on mile,

The wild sea-woods that bloomed below,  
The rainbow fish, the coral cave  
Where vanishing swift as melting snow  
A mermaid's arm would wave.

Then dashing shoreward thro' the spray  
On sun-lit sands they cast them down,  
Or in the white sea-daisies lay  
With sun-stained bodies rosy-brown,  
Content to watch the foam-bows flee  
Across the shelving reefs and bars,  
With wild eyes gazing out to sea  
Like happy haunted stars.

## IV

And O, the wild sea-maiden  
Drifting through the starlit air,  
With white arms blossom-laden  
And the sea-scents in her hair:  
Sometimes we heard her singing  
The midnight forest through,  
Or saw a soft hand flinging  
Blossoms drenched with starry dew  
Into the dreaming purple cave;  
And, sometimes, far and far away  
Beheld across the glooming wave  
Beyond the dark lagoon,  
Beyond the silvery foaming bar,  
The black bright rock whereon she lay  
Like a 'honey-coloured star  
Singing to the breathless moon,  
Singing in the silent night  
Till the stars for sheer delight  
Closed their eyes, and drowsy birds  
In the midmost forest spray  
Took their heads from out their wings,  
Thinking—it is Ariel sings  
And we must catch the witching words  
And sing them o'er by day.

V

And then, there came a breath, a breath  
Cool and strange and dark as death,  
A stealing shadow, not of the earth  
But fresh and wonder-wild as birth.  
I know not when the hour began  
That changed the child's heart in the man,  
Or when the colours began to wane,  
But all our roseate island lay  
Stricken, as when an angel dies  
With wings of rainbow-tinctured grain  
Withering, and his radiant eyes  
Closing. Pitiless walls of grey  
Gathered around us, a growing tomb  
From which it seemed not death or doom  
Could roll the stone away.

VI

Yet—I remember—  
    a gleam, a gleam,  
(Or ever I dreamed that youth could die!)  
    Of sparkling waves and warm blue sky  
As out of sleep into a dream,  
    Wonder-wild for the old sweet pain,  
We sailed into that unknown sea  
    Through the gates of Eternity.

Peacefully close your mortal eyes  
For ye shall wake to it again  
In Paradise, in Paradise.

## UNITY

I

HEART of my heart, the world is young;  
Love lies hidden in every rose!  
Every song that the skylark sung  
Once, we thought, must come to a close;

Now we know the spirit of song,  
Song that is merged in the chant of the whole,  
Hand in hand as we wander along,  
What should we doubt of the years that roll?

## II

Heart of my heart, we cannot die!  
Love triumphant in flower and tree,  
Every life that laughs at the sky  
Tells us nothing can cease to be:  
One, we are one with a song to-day,  
One with the clover that scents the wold,  
One with the Unknown, far away,  
One with the stars, when earth grows old.

## III

Heart of my heart, we are one with the wind,  
One with the clouds that are whirled o'er the lea,  
One in many, O broken and blind,  
One as the waves are at one with the sea!  
Ay! when life seems scattered apart,  
Darkens, ends as a tale that is told,  
One, we are one, O heart of my heart,  
One, still one, while the world grows old.

## THE HILL-FLOWER

*It is my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes—  
So was it sung one golden hour  
Among the woodbine wreaths;  
And yet, though wet with living dew,  
The song seemed far more sweet than true.*

Blind creatures of the sun and air  
I dreamed it but a dream  
That, like Narcissus, would confer  
With self in every stream,  
And to the leaves and boughs impart  
The tremors of a human heart.

To-day a golden pinion stirred  
The world's Bethesda pool,  
And I believed the song I heard  
Nor put my heart to school;  
And through the rainbows of the dream  
I saw the gates of Eden gleam.

The rain had ceased. The great hills rolled  
In silence to the deep:  
The gorse in waves of green and gold  
Perfumed their lonely sleep;  
And, at my feet, one elfin flower  
Drooped, blind with glories of the shower.

I stooped—a giant from the sky—  
Above its piteous shield,  
And, suddenly, the dream went by,  
And there—was heaven revealed!  
I stooped to pluck it; but my hand  
Paused, mid-way, o'er its fairyland.

Not of mine own was that strange voice,  
“Pluck—tear a star from heaven!”  
Mine only was the awful choice  
To scoff and be forgiven  
Or hear the very grass I trod  
Whispering the gentle thoughts of God.

I know not if the hill-flower's place  
Beneath that mighty sky,  
Its lonely and aspiring grace,  
Its beauty born to die,  
Touched me, I know it seemed to be  
Cherished by all Eternity.

Man, doomed to crush at every stride  
 A hundred lives like this  
 Which by their weakness were allied,  
 If by naught else, to his,  
 Can only for a flash discern  
 What passion through the whole doth yearn.

Not into words can I distil  
 The pity or the pain  
 Which hallowing all that lonely hill  
 Cried out "Refrain, refrain,"  
 Then breathed from earth and sky and sea,  
 "Herein you did it unto Me."

Somewhile that hill was heaven's own breast,  
 The flower its joy and grief,  
 Hugged close and fostered and caressed  
 In every brief bright leaf:  
 And, ere I went thro' sun and dew,  
 I leant and gently touched it, too.

## ACTÆON

"Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed  
 And bound his forehead with Proserpine's hair."

—BROWNING (*Pauline*)

## I

*Light of beauty, O, "perfect in whiteness,"  
 Softly suffused thro' the world's dark shrouds,  
 Kindling them all as they pass by thy brightness,—  
 Hills, men, cities,—a pageant of clouds,  
 Thou to whom Life and Time surrender  
 All earth's forms as to heaven's deep care,  
 Who shall pierce to thy naked splendour,  
 Bind his brows with thy hair?*

## II

Swift thro' the sprays when Spring grew bolder  
 Young Actæon swept to the chase!  
 Golden the fawn-skin, back from the shoulder  
 Flowing, set free the limbs' lithe grace,  
 Muscles of satin that rippled like sunny  
 Streams—a hunter, a young athlete,  
 Scattering dews and crushing out honey  
 Under his sandalled feet.

## III

Sunset softened the crags of the mountain,  
 Silence melted the hunter's heart,  
 Only the sob of a falling fountain  
 Pulsed in a deep ravine apart:  
 All the forest seemed waiting breathless,  
 Eager to whisper the dying day  
 Some rich word that should utter the deathless  
 Secret of youth and May.

## IV

Down, as to May thro' the flowers that attend her,  
 Slowly, on tip-toe, down the ravine  
 Fair as the sun-god, poising a slender  
 Spear like a moon-shaft silver and green,  
 Stole he! Ah, did the oak-wood ponder  
 Youth's glad dream in its heart of gloom?  
 Dryad or fawn was it started yonder?  
 Ah, what whisper of doom?

## V

Gold, thro' the ferns as he gazed and listened,  
 Shone the soul of the wood's deep dream,  
 One bright glade and a pool that glistened  
 Full in the face of the sun's last gleam,—

Gold in the heart of a violet dingle!  
 Young Actæon, beware! beware!  
 Who shall track, while the pulses tingle,  
 Spring to her woodland lair?

## VI

See, at his feet, what mystical quiver,  
 Maiden's girdle and robe of snow,  
 Tossed aside by the green glen-river  
 Ere she bathed in the pool below?  
 All the fragrance of April meets him  
 Full in the face with its young sweet breath;  
 Yet, as he steals to the glade, there greets him—  
 Hush, what whisper of death?

## VII

Lo, in the violets, lazily dreaming,  
 Young Diana, the huntress, lies:  
 One white side thro' the violets gleaming  
 Heaves and sinks with her golden sighs,  
 One white breast like a diamond crownet  
 Couched in a velvet casket glows,  
 One white arm, tho' the violets drown it,  
 Thrills their purple with rose.

## VIII

Buried in fragrance, the half-moon flashes,  
 Beautiful, clouded, from head to heel:  
 One white foot in the warm wave plashes,  
 Violets tremble and half reveal,  
 Half conceal, as they kiss, the slender  
 Slope and curve of her sleeping limbs:  
 Violets bury one half the splendour  
 Still, as thro' heaven, she swims.

## IX

Cold as the white rose waking at daybreak  
 Lifts the light of her lovely face,  
 Poised on an arm she watches the spray break  
 Over the slim white ankle's grace,  
 Watches the wave that sleeplessly tosses  
 Kissing the pure foot's pink sea-shells,  
 Watches the long-leaved heaven-dark mosses  
 Drowning their star-bright bells.

## X

Swift as the Spring where the South has brightened  
 Earth with bloom in one passionate night,  
 Swift as the violet heavens had lightened  
 Swift to perfection, blinding, white,  
 Dian arose: and Actæon saw her,  
 Only he since the world began!  
 Only in dreams could Endymion draw her  
 Down to the heart of man.

## XI

Fair as the dawn upon Himalaya  
 Anger flashed from her cheek's pure rose,  
 Alpine peaks at the passage of Maia  
 Flushed not fair as her breasts' white snows.  
 Ah, fair form of the heaven's completeness,  
 Who shall sing thee or who shall say  
 Whence that "high perfection of sweetness,"  
 Perfect to save or slay?

## XII

*Perfect in beauty, beauty the portal  
 Here on earth to the world's deep shrine,  
 Beauty hidden in all things mortal,  
 Who shall mingle his eyes with thine?*

*Thou, to whom Life and Death surrender  
 All earth's forms as to heaven's deep care,  
 Who shall pierce to thy naked splendour,  
 Bind his brows with thy hair?*

## XIII

*Beauty, perfect in blinding whiteness,  
 Softly suffused thro' the world's dark shrouds,  
 Kindling them all as they pass by her brightness,—  
 Hills, men, cities,—a pageant of clouds,  
 She, the unchanging, shepherds their changes,  
 Bids them mingle and form and flow,  
 Flowers and flocks and the great hill-ranges  
 Follow her cry and go.*

## XIV

Swift as the sweet June lightning flashes,  
 Down she stoops to the purpling pool,  
 Sudden and swift her white hand dashes  
 Rainbow mists in his eyes! “Ah, fool!  
 Hunter,” she cries to the young Actæon,  
 “Change to the hunted, rise and fly,  
 Swift ere the wild pack utter its pæan,  
 Swift for thy hounds draw nigh!”

## XV

Lo, as he trembles, the greenwood branches  
 Dusk his brows with their antlered pride!  
 Lo, as a stag thrown back on its haunches  
 Quivers, with velvet nostrils wide,  
 Lo, he changes! The soft fur darkens  
 Down to the fetlock's lifted fear!—  
 Hounds are baying!—he snuffs and hearkens,  
 “Fly, for the stag is here!”

## XVI

Swift as he leapt thro' the ferns, Actæon,  
 Young Actæon, the lordly stag,  
 Full and mellow the deep-mouthed pæan  
     Swelled behind him from crag to crag:  
 Well he remembered that sweet throat leading,  
     Wild with terror he raced and strained,  
 On thro' the darkness, thorn-swept, bleeding:  
     Ever they gained and gained!

## XVII

Death, like a darkling huntsman holloed—  
     Swift, Actæon!—desire and shame  
 Leading the pack of the passions followed.  
     Red jaws frothing with white-hot flame,  
 Volleying out of the glen, they leapt up,  
     Snapped and fell short of the foam-flecked thighs. . . .  
 Inch by terrible inch they crept up,  
     Shadows with blood-shot eyes.

## XVIII

Still with his great heart bursting asunder  
     Still thro' the night he struggled and bled;  
 Suddenly round him the pack's low thunder  
     Surged, the hounds that his own hand fed  
 Fastened in his throat, with red jaws drinking  
     Deep!—for a moment his antlered pride  
 Soared o'er their passionate seas, then, sinking,  
     Fell for the fangs to divide.

## XIX

*Light of beauty, O, perfect in whiteness,  
 Softly suffused thro' the years' dark veils,  
 Kindling them all as they pass by her brightness,  
 Filling our hearts with her old-world tales,*

*She, the unchanging, shepherds their changes,  
Bids them mingle and form and flow,  
Flowers and flocks and the great hill-ranges  
Follow her cry and go.*

## XX

Still, in the violets, lazily dreaming  
Young Diana, the huntress, lies:  
One white side thro' the violets gleaming  
Heaves and sinks with her golden sighs;  
One white breast like a diamond crownet  
Couched in a velvet casket glows,  
One white arm, tho' the violets drown it,  
Thrills their purple with rose.

## LUCIFER'S FEAST

(A EUROPEAN NIGHTMARE.)

To celebrate the ascent of man, one gorgeous night  
Lucifer gave a feast.

Its world-bewildering light  
Danced in Belshazzar's tomb, and the old kings dead and gone  
Felt their dust creep to jewels in crumbling Babylon.

Two nations were His guests—the top and flower of Time,  
The fore-front of an age which now had learned to climb  
The slopes where Newton knelt, the heights that Shakespeare  
trod,  
The mountains whence Beethoven rolled the voice of God.

Lucifer's feasting-lamps were like the morning stars,  
But at the board-head shone the blood-red lamp of Mars.

League upon glittering league, white front and flabby face  
Bent o'er the groaning board. Twelve brave men droned the  
grace;  
But with instinctive tact, in courtesy to their Host,  
Omitted God the Son and God the Holy Ghost,  
And to the God of Battles raised their humble prayers.

Then, then, like thunder, all the guests drew up their chairs.  
 By each a drinking-cup, yellow, almost, as gold,  
*(The blue eye-sockets gave the thumbs a good firm hold)*  
 Adorned the flowery board. Could even brave men shrink?

Why if the cups *were* skulls, they had red wine to drink!  
 And had not each a napkin, white and peaked and proud,  
 Waiting to wipe his mouth? A napkin? Nay, a shroud!  
 This was a giant's feast, on hell's imperial scale.  
 The blades glistened.

The shrouds—O, in one snowy gale,  
 The pink hands fluttered them out, and spread them on their  
 knees.

Who knew what gouts might drop, what filthy flakes of grease,  
 Now that o'er every shoulder, through the coiling steam,  
 Inhuman faces peered, with wolfish eyes a-gleam,  
 And grey-faced vampire Lusts that whinneyed in each ear  
 Hints of the hideous courses?

None may name them here?

None? And we may not see! The distant cauldrons cloak  
 The lava-coloured plains with clouds of umber smoke.  
 Nay, by that shrapnel-light, by those wild shooting stars  
 That rip the clouds away with fiercer fire than Mars,  
 They are painted sharp as death. If these can eat and drink  
 Chatter and laugh and rattle their knives, why should we shrink  
 From empty names? We know those ghastly gleams are true:  
 Why should Christ cry again—*They know not what they do?*  
 They, heirs of all the ages, sons of Shakespeare's land,  
 They, brothers of Beethoven, smiling, cultured, bland,  
 Whisper with sidling heads to ghouls with bloody lips.

Each takes upon his plate a small round thing that drips  
 And quivers, a child's heart.

#### Miles on miles

The glittering table bends o'er that first course, and smiles;  
 For, through the wreaths of smoke, the grey Lusts bear aloft  
 The second course, on leaden chargers, large and soft,  
 Bodies of women, steaming in an opal mist,  
 Red-branded here and there where vampire-teeth have kissed,

But white as pig's flesh, newly killed, and cleanly dressed,  
A lemon in each mouth and roses round each breast,  
Emblems to show how deeply, sweetly satisfied,  
The breasts, the lips, can sleep, whose children fought and  
died  
For—what? For country? God, once more Thy shrapnel-  
light!

Let those dark slaughter-houses burst upon our sight,  
These kitchens are too clean, too near the tiring room!  
Let Thy white shrapnel rend those filthier veils of gloom,  
Rip the last fogs away and strip the foul thing bare!  
One lightning-picture—see—yon bayonet-bristling square  
Mown down, mown down, mown down, wild swathes of crimson  
wheat,

The white-eyed charge, the blast, the terrible retreat,  
The blood-greased wheels of cannon thundering into line  
O'er that red writhe of pain, rent groin and shattered spine,  
The moaning faceless face that kissed its child last night,  
The raw pulp of the heart that beat for love's delight,  
The heap of twisting bodies, clotted and congealed  
In one red huddle of anguish on the loathsome field,  
The seas of obscene slaughter spewing their blood-red yeast,  
Multitudes pouring out their entrails for the feast,  
Knowing not why, but dying, they think, for some high cause,  
Dying for "hearth and home," their flags, their creeds, their  
laws.

Ask of the Bulls and Bears, ask if they understand  
How both great grappling armies bleed for their own land;  
For in that faith they die! These hoodwinked thousands die  
Simply as heroes, gulled by hell's profoundest lie.

Who keeps the slaughter-house? Not these, not these who  
gain

Nought but the sergeant's shilling and the homeless pain!  
Who pulls the ropes? Not these, who buy their crust of bread  
With the salt sweat of labour! These but bury their dead  
Then sweat again for food!

Christ, is the hour not come,  
To send forth one great voice and strike this dark hell dumb;  
A voice to out-crash the cannon, one united cry  
To sweep these wild-beast standards down that stain the sky,

To hurl these Lions and Bears and Eagles to their doom,  
 One voice, one heart, one soul, one fire that shall consume  
 The last red reeking shreds that flicker against the blast  
 And purge the Augean stalls we call "our glorious past"!  
 One voice from dawn and sunset, one almighty voice,  
 Full-throated as the sea—ye sons o' the earth, rejoice!  
 Beneath the all-loving sky, confederate kings ye stand,  
 Fling open wide the gates o' the world-wide Fatherland.

Poor fools, we dare not dream it! We that pule and whine  
 Of art and science, we, whose great souls leave no shrine  
 Unshattered, we that climb the Sinai Shakespeare trod,  
 The Olivets where Beethoven walked and talked with God,  
 We that have weighed the stars and reined the lightning, we  
 That stare thro' heaven and plant our footsteps in the sea,  
 We whose great souls have risen so far above the creeds  
 That we can jest at Christ and leave Him where He bleeds,  
 A legend of the dark, a tale so false or true  
 That howsoe'er we jest at Him, the jest sounds new.  
 (Our weariest dinner-tables never tire of that!  
 Let the clown sport with Christ, never the jest falls flat!)  
 Poor fools, we dare not dream a dream so strange, so great,  
 As on this ball of dust to found one "world-wide state,"  
 To float one common flag above our little lands,  
 And ere our little sun grows cold to clasp our hands  
 In friendship for a moment!

Hark, the violins  
 Are swooning through the mist. The great blue band begins,  
 Playing, in dainty scorn, a hymn we used to know,  
 How long was it, ten thousand thousand years ago?

*There is a green hill far away  
 Beside a City wall!—  
 And O, the music swung a-stray  
 With a solemn dying fall;  
 For it was a pleasant jest to play  
 Hymns in the Devil's Hall.*

And yet, and yet, if aught be true,  
 This dream we left behind,  
 This childish Christ, be-mocked anew  
 To please the men of mind,  
 Yet hung so far beyond the flight  
 Of our most lofty thought  
 That—Lucifer laughed *at us* that night.  
 Not *with us*, as he ought.

Beneath the blood-red lamp of Mars,  
 Cloaked with a scarlet cloud  
 He gazed along the line of stars  
 Above the guzzling crowd:  
 Sinister, thunder-scarred, he raised  
 His great world-wandering eyes,  
 And on some distant vision gazed  
 Beyond our cloudy skies.

*"Poor bats," he sneered, "their jungle-dark  
 Civilisation's noon!"  
 Poor wolves, that hunt in packs and bark  
 Beneath the grinning moon;  
 Poor fools, that cast the cross away,  
 Before they break the sword;  
 Poor sots, who take the night for day;  
 Have mercy on me, Lord.*

*"Beyond their wisdom's deepest skies  
 I see Thee hanging yet,  
 The love still hungering in Thine eyes,  
 Thy plaited crown still wet!  
 Thine arms outstretched to fold them all  
 Beneath Thy sheltering breast;  
 But—since they will not hear Thy call,  
 Lord, I forbear to jest.*

*"Lord, I forbear! The day I fell  
 I fell at least thro' pride!  
 Rather than these should share my hell  
 Take me, thou Crucified!"*

*O, let me share Thy cross of grief,  
And let me work Thy will,  
As morning star, or dying thief.  
Thy fallen angel still.*

*"Lord, I forbear! For Thee, at least,  
In pain so like to mine,  
The mighty meaning of their feast  
Is plain as bread and wine:  
O, smile once more, far off, alone!  
Since these nor hear nor see,  
From my deep hell, so like Thine own,  
Lord Christ, I pity Thee."*

Yet once again, he thought, they shall be fully tried,  
If they be devils or fools too light for hell's deep pride.

The champ of teeth was over, and the reeking room  
Gaped for the speeches now. Across the sulphurous fume  
Lucifer gave a sign. The guests stood thundering up!  
"Gentlemen, charge your glasses!"

Every yellow cup  
Frothed with the crimson blood. They brandished them on  
high!  
"Gentlemen, drink to those who fight and know not why!"

And in the bubbling blood each nose was buried deep.  
"Gentlemen, drink to those who sowed that we might reap!  
Drink to the pomp, pride, circumstance, of glorious war,  
The grand self-sacrifice that made us what we are!  
And drink to the peace-lovers who believe that peace  
Is War, red, bloody War; for War can never cease  
Unless we drain the veins of peace to fatten WAR!  
Gentlemen, drink to the brains that made us what we are!  
Drink to self-sacrifice that helps us all to shake  
The world with tramp of armies. Germany, awake!  
England, awake! Shakespeare's, Beethoven's Fatherland,  
Are you not both aware, do you not understand,

Self-sacrifice is competition? It is the law  
Of Life, and so, though both of you are wholly right,  
Self-sacrifice requires that both of you should fight.”  
And “Hoch! hoch! hoch!” they cried; and “Hip, hip, hip,  
Hurrah!”

This raised the gorge of Lucifer. With one deep “Bah,”  
Above those croaking toads he towered like Gabriel;

Then straightway left the table and went home to hell.

## VETERANS

(WRITTEN FOR THE RELIEF FUND OF THE CRIMEAN  
VETERANS.)

### I

WHEN the last charge sounds  
And the battle thunders o'er the plain,  
Thunders o'er the trenches where the red streams flow,  
Will it not be well with us,  
    Veterans, veterans,  
If, beneath your torn old flag, we burst upon the foe?

### II

When the last post sounds  
And the night is on the battle-field,  
Night and rest at last from all the tumult of our wars,  
Will it not be well with us,  
    Veterans, veterans,  
If, with duty done like yours, we lie beneath the stars?

## III

When the great reveille sounds  
 For the terrible last Sabaoth,  
 All the legions of the dead shall hear the trumpet ring!  
 Will it not be well with us,  
 Veterans, veterans,  
 If, beneath your torn old flag, we rise to meet our King?

## THE QUEST RENEWED

It is too soon, too soon, though time be brief,  
 Quite to forswear thy quest,  
 O Light, whose farewell dyes the falling leaf,  
 Fades thro' the fading west.

Thou'rt flown too soon! I stretch my hands out still,  
 O, Light of Life, to Thee,  
 Who leav'st an Olivet in each far blue hill,  
 A sorrow on every sea.

It is too soon, here while the loud world roars  
 For wealth and power and fame,  
 Too soon quite to forget those other shores  
 Afar, from whence I came;

Too soon even to forget the first dear dream  
 Dreamed far away, when tears could freely flow;  
 And life seemed infinite, as that sky's great gleam  
 Deepened, to which I go;

Too soon even to forget the fluttering fire  
 And those old books beside the friendly hearth,  
 When time seemed endless as my own desire,  
 And angels walked our earth;

Too soon quite to forget amid the throng  
 What once the silent hills, the sounding beach  
 Taught me—where singing was the prize of song,  
 And heaven within my reach.

It is too soon amid the cynic sneers,  
The sophist smiles, the greedy mouths and hands,  
Quite to forget the light of those dead years  
And my lost mountain-lands;

Too soon to lose that everlasting hope  
(For so it seemed) of youth in love's pure reign,  
Though while I linger on this darkening slope  
Nought seems quite worth the pain.

It is too soon for me to break that trust,  
O, Light of Light, flown far past sun and moon,  
Burn back thro' this dark panoply of dust;  
Or let me follow—soon.

### THE LIGHTS OF HOME

Pilot, how far from home?—  
Not far, not far to-night,  
A flight of spray, a sea-bird's flight,  
A flight of tossing foam,  
And then the lights of home!—

And, yet again, how far?  
And seems the way so brief?  
Those lights beyond the roaring reef  
Were lights of moon and star,  
Far, far, none knows how far!

Pilot, how far from home?—  
The great stars pass away  
Before Him as a flight of spray,  
Moons as a flight of foam!  
I see the lights of home.

## NEW POEMS

## 'TWEEN THE LIGHTS

"The Nine men's morrice is filled up with mud . . .  
From our debate, from our dissension."

—SHAKESPEARE

## I

FAIRIES, come back! We have not seen  
Your dusky foot-prints on the green  
This many a year. No frolic now  
Shakes the dew from the hawthorn-bough.  
Never a man and never a maid  
Spies you in the blue-bell shade;  
Yet, where the nine men's morrice stood,  
Our spades are clearing out the mud.

*Chorus.—Come, little irised heralds, fling  
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing  
The bright eyes and the cordial hand  
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.*

## II

Fairies, come back! Our pomp of gold,  
Our blazing noon, grows grey and old;  
The scornful glittering ages wane:  
Forgive, forget, come back again.  
This is our England's Hallowe'en!  
Come, trip it, trip it o'er the green,  
Trip it, amidst the roaring mart,  
In the still meadows of the heart.

*Come, little irised heralds, fling  
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing  
The bright eyes and the cordial hand  
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.*

## III

Fairies, come back! Once more the gleams  
Of your lost Eden haunt our dreams,  
Where Evil, at the touch of Good,  
Withers in the Enchanted Wood:  
Fairies, come back! Drive gaunt Despair  
And Famine to their ghoulish lair!  
Tap at each heart's bright window-pane  
Thro' merry England once again.

*Come, little irised heralds, fling  
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing  
The bright eyes and the cordial hand  
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.*

## IV

Fairies, come back! And, if you bring  
That long-expected song to sing,  
Ciss needs not, ere she welcomes you,  
To find a sixpence in her shoe!  
If, of the mud he clears away,  
Tom bears the ignoble stain to-day,  
Come back, and he will not forget  
The heavens that yearn beyond us yet.

*Come, little irised heralds, fling  
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing  
The bright eyes and the cordial hand  
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.*

## V

Yet, if for this you will not come,  
Your friends, the children, call you home,  
Fairies, they wear no May-day crowns,  
Your playmates in those grim black towns  
Look, fairies, how they peak and pine,  
How hungrily their great eyes shine!  
From fevered alley and foetid lane  
Plead the thin arms—*Come back again!*

*Come, little irised heralds, fling  
 Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing  
 The bright eyes and the cordial hand  
 Of brotherhood thro' all our land.*

## VI

We have named the stars and weighed the moon,  
 Counted our gains and . . . lost the boon,  
 If this be the end of all our lore—  
 To draw the blind and close the door!  
 O, lift the latch, slip in between  
 The things which we have heard and seen,  
 Slip thro' the fringes of the blind  
 Into the souls of all mankind.

*Come, little irised heralds, fling  
 Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing  
 The bright eyes and the cordial hand  
 Of brotherhood thro' all our land.*

## VII

Fairies, come back! Our wisdom dies  
 Beneath your deeper, starrier skies!  
 We have reined the lightning, probed the flower:  
 Bless, as of old, our twilight hour!  
 Bring dreams, and let the dreams be true,  
 Bring hope that makes each heart anew,  
 Bring love that knits all hearts in one;  
 Then—sing of heaven and bring the sun!

*Come, little irised heralds, fling  
 Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing  
 The bright eyes and the cordial hand  
 Of brotherhood thro' all our land.*

## CREATION

IN the beginning, there was nought  
 But heaven, one Majesty of Light,  
 Beyond all speech, beyond all thought,  
 Beyond all depth, beyond all height,  
 Consummate heaven, the first and last,  
 Enfolding in its perfect prime  
 No future rushing to the past,  
 But one rapt Now, that knew not Space or Time.

Formless it was, being gold on gold,  
 And void—but with that complete Life  
 Where music could no wings unfold  
 Till lo, God smote the strings of strife!  
 “Myself unto Myself am Throne,  
 Myself unto Myself am Thrall  
 I that am All am all alone,”  
 He said, “Yea, I have nothing, having all.”

And, gathering round His mount of bliss  
 The angel-squadrons of His will,  
 He said, “One battle yet there is  
 To win, one vision to fulfil!  
 Since heaven where'er I gaze expands,  
 And power that knows no strife or cry,  
 Weakness shall bind and pierce My hands  
 And make a world for Me wherein to die.

“All might, all vastness and all glory  
 Being Mine, I must descend and make  
 Out of My heart a song, a story  
 Of little hearts that burn and break;  
 Out of My passion without end  
 I will make little azure seas,  
 And into small sad fields descend  
 And make green grass, white daisies, rustling trees.”

Then shrank His angels, knowing He thrust  
 His arms out East and West and gave  
 For every little dream of dust  
 Part of His life as to a grave!

*"Enough, O Father, for Thy words  
Have pierced Thy hands!"* But, low and sweet,  
He said "Sunsets and streams and birds,  
And drifting clouds!"—The purple stained His feet.—

*"Enough!"* His angels moaned in fear,  
*"Father, Thy words have pierced Thy side!"*  
He whispered, "Roses shall grow there,  
And there must be a hawthorn-tide,  
And ferns, dewy at dawn," and still  
They moaned—"Enough, the red drops bleed!"  
"And," sweet and low, "on every hill,"  
He said, "I will have flocks and lambs to lead."

His angels bowed their heads beneath  
Their wings till that great pang was gone:  
*"Pour not Thy soul out unto Death!"*  
They moaned, and still His Love flowed on,  
"There shall be small white wings to stray  
From bliss to bliss, from bloom to bloom,  
And blue flowers in the wheat; and—" "*Stay!*  
*Speak not,*" they cried, "*the word that seals Thy tomb!*"

He spake—"I have thought of a little child  
That I will have there to embark  
On small adventures in the wild,  
And front slight perils in the dark;  
And I will hide from him and lure  
His laughing eyes with suns and moons,  
And rainbows that shall not endure;  
And—when he is weary, sing him drowsy tunes."

His angels fell before Him weeping  
*"Enough! Tempt not the Gates of Hell!"*  
He said, "His soul is in his keeping  
That we may love each other well,  
And lest the dark too much affright him,  
I will strew countless little stars  
Across his childish skies to light him  
That he may wage in peace his mimic wars;

"And oft forget Me as he plays  
With swords and childish merchandize,  
Or with his elfin balance weighs,  
Or with his foot-rule metes, the skies;  
Or builds his castles by the deep,  
Or tunnels through the rocks, and then—  
Turn to Me as he falls asleep,  
And, in his dreams, feel for My hand again.

"And when he is older he shall be  
My friend and walk here at My side;  
Or—when he wills—grow young with Me,  
And, to that happy world where once we died  
Descending through the calm blue weather,  
Buy life once more with our immortal breath,  
And wander through the little fields together,  
And taste of Love and Death."

### THE PEACEMAKER.

SILENTLY over his vast imperial seas,  
Over his sentinel fleets the Shadow swept  
And all his armies slept.  
There was but one quick challenge at the gate,  
Then—the cold menace of that out-stretched hand,  
Waving aside the panoplies of State,  
Brought the last faithful watchers to their knees,  
And lightning flashed the grief from land to land.

Mourn, Britain, mourn; not for a king alone!  
This was the people's king! His purple throne  
Was in their hearts. They shared it. Millions of swords  
Could not have shaken it! Sharers of this doom,  
This democratic doom which all men know,  
His Common-weal, in this great common woe,  
Veiling its head in the universal gloom,  
With that majestic grief which knows not words,  
Bows o'er a world-wide tomb.

Mourn, Europe, for our England set this Crown  
 In splendour past the reach of temporal power,  
 Secure above the thunders of the hour,  
 A sun in the great skies of her renown,  
 A sun to hold her wheeling worlds in one  
 By its own course of duty pre-ordained,  
 Where'er the meteors flash and fall, a sun  
 With its great course of duty!

So he reigned,

And died in its observance. Mightier he  
 Than any despot, in his people's love,  
 He served that law which rules the Thrones above,  
 That world-wide law which by the raging sea  
 Abased the flatterers of Canúte and makes  
 The King that abnegates all lesser power  
 A rock in time of trouble, and a tower  
 Of strength where'er the tidal tempest breaks;  
 That world-wide law whose name is harmony,  
 Whose service perfect freedom!

And *his* name

*The Peacemaker*, through all the future years  
 Shall burn, a glorious and prophetic flame,  
 A beaconing sun that never shall go down,  
 A sun to speed the world's diviner morrow,  
 A sun that shines the brighter for our sorrow;  
 For, O, what splendour in a monarch's crown  
 Vies with the splendour of his people's tears?

And now, O now, while the sorrowful trumpet is blown,  
 From island to continent, zone to imperial zone,  
 And the flags of the nations are lowered in grief with our own;  
 Now, while the roll of the drums that for battle were dumb  
 When he reigned, salute his passing; and low on the breeze  
 From the snow-bound North to the Australasian seas  
 Surges the solemn lament—O, shall it not come,  
 A glimpse of that mightier union of all mankind?  
 Now, though our eyes, as they gaze on the vision, grow blind,  
 Now, while the world is all one funeral knell,  
 And the mournful cannon thunder his great farewell,

Now, while the bells of a thousand cities toll,  
 Remember, O England, remember the ageless goal,  
 Rally the slumbering faith in the depths of thy soul,  
 Lift up thine eyes to the Kingdom for which he fought,  
 That Empire of Peace and Good-will, for which to his death-  
 hour he wrought.

Then, then while the pomp of the world seems a little thing,

Ay, though by the world it be said,

*The King is dead!*

We shall lift up our hearts and answer—*Long live the King!*

### THE SAILOR-KING

THE fleet, the fleet puts out to sea

In a thunder of blinding foam to-night,  
 With a bursting wreck-strewn reef to lee,

But—a seaman fired yon beacon-light!

Seamen hailing a seaman, know—

Free-men crowning a free-man, sing—

The worth of that light where the great ships go,

The signal-fire of the king.

Cloud and wind may shift and veer:

This is steady and this is sure,

A signal over our hope and fear,

A pledge of the strength that shall endure—

Having no part in our storm-tossed strife—

A sign of union, which shall bring

Knowledge to men of their close-knit life,

The signal-fire of the king.

His friends are the old grey glorious waves,

The wide world round, the wide world round,

That have roared with our guns and covered our graves

From Nombre Dios to Plymouth Sound;

And his crown shall shine, a central sun

Round which the planet-nations sing,

Going their ways, but linked in one,

As the ships of our sailor-king.

Many the ships, but a single fleet;  
 Many the roads, but a single goal;  
 And a light, a light where all roads meet,  
   The beacon-fire of an Empire's soul;  
 The worth of that light his seamen know,  
   Through all the deaths that the storm can bring  
 The crown of their comrade-ship a-glow,  
   The signal-fire of the king.

## THE FIDDLER'S FAREWELL

WITH my fiddle to my shoulder,  
   And my hair turning grey,  
 And my heart growing older  
   I must shuffle on my way!  
 Tho' there's not a hearth to greet me  
   I must reap as I sowed,  
 And—the sunset shall meet me  
   At the turn of the road.

O, the whin's a dusky yellow  
   And the road a rosy white,  
 And the blackbird's call is mellow  
   At the falling of night;  
 And there's honey in the heather  
   Where we'll make our last abode,  
 My tunes and me together  
   At the turn of the road.

I have fiddled for your city  
   Thro' market-place and inn!  
 I have poured forth my pity  
   On your sorrow and your sin!  
 But your riches are your burden,  
   And your pleasure is your goad!  
 I've the whin-gold for guerdon  
   At the turn of the road.

Your village-lights 'll call me  
As the lights of home the dead;  
But a black night befall me  
Ere your pillows rest my head!  
God be praised, tho' like a jewel  
Every cottage casement showed,  
There's a star that's not so cruel  
At the turn of the road.

Nay, beautiful and kindly  
Are the faces drawing nigh,  
But I gaze on them blindly  
And hasten, hasten by;  
For O, no face of wonder  
On earth has ever glowed  
Like the One that waits me yonder  
At the turn of the road.

Her face is lit with splendour,  
She dwells beyond the skies;  
But deep, deep and tender  
Are the tears in her eyes:  
The angels see them glistening  
In pity for my load,  
And—she's waiting there, she's listening,  
At the turn of the road.

## TO A PESSIMIST

LIFE like a cruel mistress woos  
The passionate heart of man, you say,  
Only in mockery to refuse  
His love, at last, and turn away.

To me she seems a queen that knows  
How great is love—but ah, how rare!—  
And, pointing heavenward ere she goes,  
Gives him the rose from out her hair.

## MOUNT IDA

[This poem commemorates an event of some years ago, when a young Englishman—still remembered by many of his contemporaries at Oxford—went up into Mount Ida and was never seen again.]

## I

Not cypress, but this warm pine-plumage now  
 Fragrant with sap, I pluck; nor bid you weep,  
 Ye Muses that still haunt the heavenly brow  
 Of Ida, though the ascent is hard and steep:  
 Weep not for him who left us wrapped in sleep  
 At dawn beneath the holy mountain's breast  
 And all alone from Ilion's gleaming shore  
 Clomb the high sea-ward glens, fain to drink deep  
 Of earth's old glory from your silent crest,  
 Take the cloud-conquering throne  
 Of gods, and gaze alone  
 Thro' heaven. Darkling we slept who saw his face no more.

## II

Ah yet, in him hath Lycidas a brother,  
 And Adonaïs will not say him nay,  
 And Thyrsis to the breast of one sweet Mother  
 Welcomes him, climbing by the self-same way:  
 Quietly as a cloud at break of day  
 Up the long glens of golden dew he stole  
 (And surely Bion called to him afar!)  
 The tearful hyacinths, and the greenwood spray  
 Clinging to keep him from the sapphire goal,  
 Kept of his path no trace!  
 Upward the yearning face  
 Clomb the ethereal height, calm as the morning star.

## III

Ah yet, incline, dear Sisters, or my song  
 That with the light wings of the skimming swallow  
 Must range the reedy slopes, will work him wrong!  
 And with some golden shaft do thou, Apollo,  
 Show the pine-shadowed path that none may follow;

For, as the blue air shuts behind a bird,  
 Round him closed Ida's cloudy woods and rills!  
 Day-long, night-long, by echoing height and hollow,  
 We called him, but our tumult died unheard:  
     Down from the scornful sky  
     Our faint wing-broken cry  
 Fluttered and perished among the many-folded hills.

## IV

Ay, though we climb each faint-flushed peak of vision,  
 Nought but our own sad faces we divined:  
 Thy radiant way still laughed us to derision,  
 And still revengeful Echo proved unkind;  
 And oft our faithless hearts half feared to find  
     Thy cold corse in some dark mist-drenched ravine  
     Where the white foam flashed headlong to the sea:  
 How should we find thee, spirits deaf and blind  
     Even to the things which we had heard and seen?  
         Eyes that could see no more  
         The old light on sea and shore,  
 What should they hope or fear to find? They found not thee;

## V

For thou wast ever alien to our skies,  
 A wistful stray of radiance on this earth,  
 A changeling with deep memories in thine eyes  
     Mistily gazing thro' our loud-voiced mirth  
 To some fair land beyond the gates of birth;  
     Yet as a star thro' clouds, thou still didst shed  
         Through our dark world thy lovelier, rarer glow;  
 Time, like a picture of but little worth,  
     Before thy young hand lifelessly outspread,  
         At one light stroke from thee  
         Gleamed with Eternity;  
 Thou gav'st the master's touch, and we—we did not know.

## VI

Not though we gazed from heaven o'er Ilion  
 Dreaming on earth below, mistily crowned  
 With towering memories, and beyond her shone  
 The wine-dark seas Achilles heard resound!  
 Only, and after many days, we found  
 Dabbled with dew, at border of a wood  
 Bedded in hyacinths, open and a-glow  
 Thy Homer's Iliad. . . . Dryad tears had drowned  
 The rough Greek type and, as with honey or blood,  
 One crocus with crushed gold  
 Stained the great page that told  
 Of gods that sighed their loves on Ida, long ago.

## VII

*See—for a couch to their ambrosial limbs  
 Even as their golden load of splendour presses  
 The fragrant thyme, a billowing cloud up-swims  
 Of springing flowers beneath their deep caresses,  
 Hyacinth, lotus, crocus, wildernesses  
 Of bloom . . . but clouds of sunlight and of dew  
 Dropping rich balm, round the dark pine-woods curled  
 That the warm wonder of their in-woven tresses,  
 And all the secret blisses that they knew,  
 Where beauty kisses truth  
 In heaven's deep heart of youth,  
 Might still be hidden, as thou art, from the heartless world.*

## VIII

Even as we found thy book, below these rocks  
 Perchance that strange great eagle's feather lay,  
 When Ganymede, from feeding of his flocks  
 On Ida, vanished thro' the morning grey:  
 Stranger it seemed, if thou couldst cast away

'Those golden musics as a thing of nought,  
 A dream for which no longer thou hadst need!  
 Ah, was it here then that the break of day  
 Brought thee the substance for the shadow, taught  
 Thy soul a swifter road  
 To ease it of its load  
 And watch this world of shadows as a dream recede?

## IX

We slept! Darkling we slept! Our busy schemes,  
 Our cold mechanic world awhile was still;  
 But O, their eyes are blinded even in dreams  
 Who from the heavenlier Powers withdraw their will:  
 Here did the dawn with purer light fulfil  
 Thy happier eyes than ours, here didst thou see  
 The quivering wonder-light in flower and dew,  
 The quickening glory of the haunted hill,  
 The Hamadryad beckoning from the tree.  
 The Naiad from the stream;  
 While from her long dark dream  
 Earth woke, trembling with life, light, beauty, through and  
 through.

## X

And the everlasting miracle of things  
 Flowed round thee, and this dark earth opposed no bar,  
 And radiant faces from the flowers and springs  
 Dawned on thee, whispering, *Knowest thou whence we are?*  
 Faintly thou heardst us calling thee afar  
 As Hylas heard, swooning beneath the wave,  
 Girdled with glowing arms, while wood and glen  
 Echoed his name beneath that rosy star;  
 And thy farewell came faint as from the grave  
 For very bliss; but we  
 Could neither hear nor see;  
 And all the hill with *Hylas! Hylas!* rang again.

## XI

But there were deeper love-tales for thine ears  
     Than mellow-tongued Theocritus could tell:  
 Over him like a sea two thousand years  
     Had swept. They solemnized his music well!  
 Farewell! What word could answer but farewell,  
     From thee, O happy spirit, that couldst steal  
         So quietly from this world at break of day?  
 What voice of ours could break the silent spell  
     Beauty had cast upon thee, or reveal  
         The gates of sun and dew  
             Which oped and let thee through  
 And led thee heavenward by that deep enchanted way?

## XII

Yet here thou mad'st thy choice: Love, Wisdom, Power,  
     As once before young Paris, they stood here!  
 Beneath them Ida, like one full-blown flower,  
     Shed her bloom earthward thro' the radiant air  
 Leaving her rounded fruit, their beauty, bare  
     To the everlasting dawn; and, in thy palm  
         The golden apple of the Hesperian isle  
 Which thou must only yield to the Most Fair;  
     But not to Juno's great luxurious calm,  
         Nor Dian's curved white moon,  
             Gav'st thou the sunset's boon,  
 Nor to foam-bosomed Aphrodite's rose-lipped smile.

## XIII

Here didst thou make the eternal choice aright,  
     Here, in this hallowed haunt of nymph and faun,  
 They stood before thee in that great new light,  
     The three great splendours of the immortal dawn,  
 With all the cloudy veils of Time withdrawn

Or only glistening round the firm white snows  
 Of their pure beauty like the golden dew  
 Brushed from the feathery ferns below the lawn;  
 But not to cold Diana's morning rose,  
 Nor to great Juno's frown  
 Cast thou the apple down,  
 And, when the Paphian raised her lustrous eyes anew,

## XIV

*Thou from thy soul didst whisper—in that heaven  
 Which yearns beyond us! Lead me up the height!  
 How should the golden fruit to one be given  
 Till your three splendours in that Sun unite  
 Where each in each ye move like light in light?  
 How should I judge the rapture till I know  
 The pain? And like three waves of music there  
 They closed thee round, blinding thy blissful sight  
 With beauty and, like one roseate orb a-glow,  
 They bore thee on their breasts  
 Up the sun-smitten crests  
 And melted with thee smiling into the Most Fair.*

## XV

Upward and onward, ever as ye went  
 The cities of the world nestled beneath  
 Closer, as if in love, round Ida, blent  
 With alien hills in one great bridal-wreath  
 Of dawn-flushed clouds; while, breathing with your breath  
 New heavens mixed with your mounting bliss. Deep eyes,  
 Beautiful eyes, imbrued with the world's tears  
 Dawned on you, beautiful gleams of Love and Death  
 Flowed thro' your questioning with divine replies  
 From that ineffable height  
 Dark with excess of light  
 Where the Ever-living dies and the All-loving hears.

## XVI

For thou hadst seen what tears upon man's face  
 Bleed from the heart or burned from out the brain,  
 And not denied or cursed, but couldst embrace  
 Infinite sweetness in the heart of pain,  
 And heardst those universal choirs again  
 Wherein like waves of one harmonious sea  
 All our slight dreams of heaven are singing still,  
 And still the throned Olympians swell the strain,  
 And, hark, the burden of all—*Come unto Me!*  
 Sky into deepening sky  
 Melts with that one great cry;  
 And the lost doves of Ida moan on Siloa's hill.

## XVII

I gather all the ages in my song  
 And send them singing up the heights to thee!  
 Chord by æonian chord the stars prolong  
 Their passionate echoes to Eternity:  
 Earth wakes, and one orchestral symphony  
 Sweeps o'er the quivering harp-strings of mankind;  
 Grief modulates into heaven, hate drowns in love,  
 No strife now but of love in that great sea  
 Of song! I dream! I dream! Mine eyes grow blind:  
 Chords that I not command  
 Escape the fainting hand;  
 Tears fall. Thou canst not hear. Thou'rt still too far above.

## XVIII

Farewell! What word should answer but farewell  
 From thee, O happy spirit, whose clear gaze  
 Discerned the path—clear, but unsearchable—  
 Where Olivet sweetens, deepens, Ida's praise,  
 The path that strikes as thro' a sunlit haze

'Through Time to that clear reconciling height  
 Where our commingling gleams of godhead dwell;  
 Strikes thro' the turmoil of our darkling days  
 To that great harmony where, like light in light,  
 Wisdom and Beauty still  
 Haunt the thrice-holy hill,  
 And Love, immortal Love . . . what answer but farewell?

## THE ELECTRIC TRAM

## I

Bluff and burly and splendid  
 Thro' roaring traffic-tides,  
 By secret lightnings attended  
 The land-ship hisses and glides.  
 And I sit on its bridge and I watch and I dream  
 While the world goes gallantly by,  
 With all its crowded houses and its colored shops a-stream  
 Under the June-blue sky,  
 Heigh, ho!  
 Under the June-blue sky.

## II

There's a loafer at the kerb with a sulphur-coloured pile  
 Of "Lights! Lights! Lights!" to sell;  
 And a flower-girl there with some lilies and a smile  
 By the gilt swing-doors of a drinking hell,  
 Where the money is rattling loud and fast,  
 And I catch one glimpse as the ship swings past  
 Of a woman with a babe at her breast  
 Wrapped in a ragged shawl;  
 She is drinking away with the rest,  
 And the sun shines over it all,  
 Heigh, ho!  
 The sun shines over it all!

## III

And a barrel-organ is playing,  
 Somewhere, far away,  
*Abide with me, and The world is gone a-maying,*  
 And *What will the policeman say?*  
 There's a glimpse of the river down an alley by a church,  
 And the barges with their tawny-coloured sails,  
 And a grim and grimy coal-wharf where the London pigeons  
 perch  
 And flutter and spread their tails,  
 Heigh, ho!  
 Flutter and spread their tails.

## IV

O, what does it mean, all the pageant and the pity,  
 The waste and the wonder and the shame?  
 I am riding tow'rds the sunset thro' the vision of a City  
 Which we cloak with the stupor of a name!  
 I am riding thro' ten thousand thousand tragedies and terrors,  
 Ten million heavens that save and hells that damn;  
 And the lightning draws my car tow'rds the golden evening star;  
 And—They call it only "riding on a tram,"  
 Heigh, ho!  
 They call it only "riding on a tram."

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## SHERWOOD

## PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

ROBIN . . . . .	Earl of Huntingdon, known as "Robin Hood."
LITTLE JOHN . . . . .	
FRIAR TUCK . . . . .	
WILL SCARLET . . . . .	
REYNOLD GREENLEAF . . . . .	
MUCH, THE MILLER'S SON . . . . .	
ALLAN-A-DALE . . . . .	

}

Outlaws and followers of  
"Robin Hood."

PRINCE JOHN.

KING RICHARD, Cœur de  
Lion.

BLONDEL . . . . . King Richard's minstrel.

OBERON . . . . . King of the Fairies.

TITANIA . . . . . Queen of the Fairies.

PUCK . . . . . A Fairy.

THE SHERIFF OF NOT-

TINGHAM.

FITZWALTER . . . . . Father of Marian, known as  
"Maid Marian."

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF . . . . . A Fool.

ARTHUR PLANTAGENET . . . . Nephew to Prince John, a  
boy of about ten years of  
age.

QUEEN ELINOR . . . . . Mother of Prince John and  
Richard Lion-Heart.

MARIAN FITZWALTER . . . . Known as Maid Marian, be-  
trothed to Robin Hood.

JENNY . . . . . Maid to Marian.

WIDOW SCARLET . . . . Mother of Will Scarlet.

PRIORESS OF KIRKLEE.

Fairies, merry men, serfs, peasants, mercenaries, an  
abbot, a baron, a novice, nuns, courtiers, sol-  
diers, retainers, etc.

## ACT I

SCENE I. *Night. The borders of the forest. The smouldering  
embers of a Saxon homestead. The Sheriff and his  
men are struggling with a SERF.*

### SERF

No, no, not that! not that! If you should blind me  
God will repay you. Kill me out of hand!

[Enter PRINCE JOHN and several of his retainers.]

JOHN

Who is this night-jar?

[*The retainers laugh.*]

Surely, master Sheriff,  
You should have cut its tongue out, first. Its cries  
Tingle so hideously across the wood  
They'll wake the King in Palestine. Small wonder  
That Robin Hood evades you.

SHERIFF

[*To the SERF.*]

Silence, dog,

Know you not better than to make this clamour  
Before Prince John?

SERF

Prince John! It is Prince John!  
For God's love save me, sir!

JOHN

Whose thrall is he?

SHERIFF

I know not, sir, but he was caught red-handed  
Killing the king's deer. By the forest law  
He should of rights be blinded; for, as you see,  
[*He indicates the SERF's right hand.*]  
'Tis not his first deer at King Richard's cost.

JOHN

'Twill save you trouble if you say at mine.

SHERIFF

Ay, sir, I pray your pardon—at *your* cost!  
His right hand lacks the thumb and arrow-finger,  
And though he vows it was a falling tree  
That crushed them, you may trust your Sheriff, sir,  
It was the law that clipped them when he last  
Hunted your deer.

## SERF

Prince, when the Conqueror came,  
They burned my father's homestead with the rest  
To make the King a broader hunting-ground.  
I have hunted there for food. How could I bear  
To hear my hungry children crying? Prince,  
They'll make good bowmen for your wars, one day.

## JOHN

He is much too fond of 'Prince': he'll never live  
To see a king. Whose thrall?—his iron collar,  
Look, is the name not on it?

## SHERIFF

Sir, the name

Is filed away, and in another hour  
The ring would have been broken. He is one of those  
Green adders of the moon, night-creeping thieves  
Whom Huntingdon has tempted to the woods.  
These desperate ruffians flee their lawful masters  
And flock around the disaffected Earl  
Like ragged rooks around an elm, by scores!  
And now, i' faith, the sun of Huntingdon  
Is setting fast. They've well nigh beggared him,  
Eaten him out of house and home. They say  
That, when we make him outlaw, we shall find  
Nought to distrain upon, but empty cupboards.

## JOHN

Did you not serve him once yourself?

## SHERIFF

Oh, ay,

He was more prosperous then. But now my cupboards  
Are full, and his are bare. Well, I'd think scorn  
To share a crust with outcast churls and thieves,  
Doffing his dignity, letting them call him  
Robin, or Robin Hood, as if an Earl  
Were just a plain man, which he will be soon,

When we have served our writ of outlawry!  
 'Tis said he hopes much from the King's return  
 And swears by Lion-Heart; and though King Richard  
 Is brother to yourself, 'tis all the more  
 Ungracious, sir, to hope he should return,  
 And overset your rule. But then—to keep  
 Such base communications! Myself would think it  
 Unworthy of my sheriffship, much more  
 Unworthy a right Earl.

## JOHN

You talk too much!  
 This whippet, here, slinks at his heel, you say.  
 Mercy may close her eyes, then. Take him off,  
 Blind him or what you will; and let him thank  
 His master for it. But wait—perhaps he knows  
 Where we may trap this young patrician thief.  
 Where is your master?

## SERF

Where you'll never find him.

## JOHN

Oh, ho! the dog is faithful! Take him away.  
 Get your red business done. I shall require  
 Your men to ride with me.

## SHERIFF

[To his men.]

Take him out yonder,  
 A bow-shot into the wood, so that his clamour  
 Do not offend my lord. Delay no time,  
 The irons are hot by this. They'll give you light  
 Enough to blind him by.

## SERF

[Crying out and struggling as he is forced back into the forest]  
 No, no, not that!  
 God will repay you! Kill me out of hand!

SHERIFF

[To PRINCE JOHN.]

There is a kind of justice in all this.  
The irons being heated in that fire, my lord,  
Which was his hut, aforetime.

[*Some of the men take the glowing irons from the fire and follow into the wood.*]

There's no need

To parley with him, either. The snares are laid  
For Robin Hood. He goes this very night  
To his betrothal feast.

JOHN

Betrothal feast!

SHERIFF

At old Fitzwalter's castle, sir.

JOHN

Ha! ha!

There will be one more guest there than he thought!  
Ourselves are riding thither. We intended  
My Lady Marian for a happier fate  
Than bride to Robin Hood. Your plans are laid  
To capture him?

SHERIFF

[Consequentially.]

It was our purpose, sir,

To serve the writ of outlawry upon him  
And capture him as he came forth.

JOHN

That's well.

Then—let him disappear—you understand?

SHERIFF

I have your warrant, sir? Death? A great Earl?

JOHN

Why, first declare him outlawed at his feast!  
 'Twill gladden the tremulous heart of old Fitzwalter  
 With his prospective son-in-law; and then—  
 No man will overmuch concern himself  
 Whither an outlaw goes. You understand?

SHERIFF

It shall be done, sir.

JOHN

But the Lady Marian!  
 By heaven, I'll take her. I'll banish old Fitzwalter  
 If he prevent my will in this. You'll bring  
 How many men to ring the castle round?

SHERIFF

A good five score of bowmen.

JOHN

Then I'll take her  
 This very night as hostage for Fitzwalter,  
 Since he consorts with outlaws. These grey rats  
 Will gnaw my kingdom's heart out. For 'tis mine,  
 This England, now or later. They that hold  
 By Richard, as their absent king, would make  
 My rule a usurpation. God, am I  
 My brother's keeper?

[*There is a cry in the forest from the SERF, who immediately afterwards appears at the edge of the glade, shaking himself free from his guards. He seizes a weapon and rushes at PRINCE JOHN. One of the retainers runs him through and he falls at the PRINCE's feet.*]

JOHN

That's a happy answer!

## SHERIFF

[*Stooping over the body.*]

He is dead.

## JOHN

I am sorry. It were better sport  
To send him groping like a hoodman blind  
Through Sherwood, whimpering for his Robin. Come,  
I'll ride with you to this betrothal feast.  
Now for my Lady Marian!

[*Exeunt all. A pause. The scene darkens. Shadowy figures creep out from the thickets, of old men, women and children.*]

## FIRST OLD MAN

[*Stretching his arms up to Heaven.*]

God, am I

My brother's keeper? Witness, God in heaven,  
He said it and not we—Cain's word, he said it!

## FIRST WOMAN

[*Kneeling by the body.*]

O Father, Father, and the blood of Abel  
Cries to thee!

## A BLIND MAN

Is there any light here still?

I feel a hot breath on my face. The dark  
Is better for us all. I am sometimes glad  
They blinded me those many years ago.  
Princes are princes; and God made the world  
For one or two it seems. Well, I am glad  
I cannot see His world.

## FIRST WOMAN

[*Still by the body and whispering to the others.*]

Keep him away.

'Tis as we thought. The dead man is his son.

Keep him away, poor soul. He need not know.

[*Some of the men carry the body among the thickets.*]

## A CHILD

Mother, I'm hungry, I'm hungry!

## FIRST OLD MAN

There's no food  
For any of us to-night. The snares are empty,  
And I can try no more.

## THE BLIND MAN

Wait till my son  
Comes back. He's a rare hunter is my boy.  
You need not fret, poor little one. My son  
Is much too quick and clever for the Sheriff.  
He'll bring you something good. Why, ha! ha! ha!  
Friends, I've a thought—the Sheriff's lit the fire  
Ready for us to roast our meat. Come, come,  
Let us be merry while we may! My boy  
Will soon come back with food for the old folks.  
The fire burns brightly, eh?

## SECOND OLD MAN

The fire that feeds  
On hope and eats our hearts away. They've burnt  
Everything, everything!

## THE BLIND MAN

Ah, princes are princes!  
But when the King comes home from the Crusade,  
We shall have better times.

## FIRST OLD MAN

Ay, when the King  
Comes home from the Crusade.

## CHILD

Mother, I'm hungry.

## SECOND WOMAN

Oh, but if I could only find a crust  
 Left by the dogs. Masters, the child will starve.  
 We must have food.

## THE BLIND MAN

I tell you when my boy  
 Comes back, we shall have plenty!

## FIRST WOMAN

God pity thee!

## THE BLIND MAN

What dost thou mean?

## SECOND WOMAN

Masters, the child will starve.

## FIRST OLD MAN

Hist, who comes here—a forester?

## THE BLIND MAN

We'd best  
 Slip back into the dark.

## FIRST WOMAN

[*Excitedly.*]

No, stay! All's well  
 There's Shadow-of-a-Leaf, good Lady Marian's fool  
 Beside him!

## THE BLIND MAN

Ah, they say there's fairy blood  
 In Shadow-of-a-Leaf. But I've no hopes of more  
 From him, than wild bees' honey-bags.

[Enter LITTLE JOHN, a giant figure, leading a donkey, laden  
 with a sack. On the other side, SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF  
 trips, a slender figure in green trunk-hose and doublet.  
 He is tickling the donkey's ears with a long fern.]

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Gee! Whoa!

Neddy, my boy, have you forgot the Weaver.  
 And how Titania tickled your long ears?  
 Ha! ha! Don't ferns remind you?

## LITTLE JOHN

Friends, my master  
 Hath sent me to you, fearing ye might hunger.

## FIRST OLD MAN

Thy master?

LITTLE JOHN  
 Robin Hood.

SECOND WOMAN  
*[Falling on her knees.]*

God bless his name.

God bless the kindly name of Robin Hood.

LITTLE JOHN  
*[Giving them food.]*

'Tis well nigh all that's left him; and to-night  
 He goes to his betrothal feast.

*[All the outcasts except the first old man exeunt.]*

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF  
*[Pointing to the donkey.]*

Now look,

There's nothing but that shadow of a cross  
 On his grey back to tell you of the palms  
 That once were strewn before my Lord, the King.  
 Won't ferns, won't branching ferns, do just as well?  
 There's only a dream to ride my donkey now!  
 But, Neddy, I'll lead you home and cry—HOSANNA!  
 We'll thread the glad Gate Beautiful again,  
 Though now there's only a Fool to hold your bridle  
 And only moonlit ferns to strew your path,  
 And the great King is fighting for a grave  
 In lands beyond the sea. Come, Neddy, come,  
 Hosanna!

*[Exit SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF with the donkey. He strews ferns before it as he goes.]*

## FIRST OLD MAN

'Tis a strange creature, master! Thinkest  
There's fairy blood in him?

## LITTLE JOHN

'Twas he that brought  
Word of your plight to Robin Hood. He flits  
Like Moonshine thro' the forest. He'll be home  
Before I know it. I must be hastening back.  
This makes a sad betrothal night.

## FIRST OLD MAN

That minds me,  
Couched in the thicket yonder, we overheard  
The Sheriff tell Prince John . . .

## LITTLE JOHN

Prince John!

## FIRST OLD MAN

You'd best  
Warn Robin Hood. They're laying a trap for him.  
Ay! Now I mind me of it! I heard 'em say  
They'd take him at the castle.

## LITTLE JOHN

To-night?

## FIRST OLD MAN

To-night!  
Fly, lad, for God's dear love. Warn Robin Hood!  
Fly like the wind, or you'll be there too late.  
And yet you'd best be careful. There's five score  
In ambush round the castle.

## LITTLE JOHN

I'll be there

An if I have to break five hundred heads!

[*He rushes off thro' the forest. The old man goes into the thicket after the others. The scene darkens. A soft light, as*

*of the moon, appears between the ferns to the right of the glade, showing OBERON and TITANIA.]*

## TITANIA

Yet one night more the gates of fairyland  
Are opened by a mortal's kindly deed.

## OBERON

Last night the gates were shut, and I heard weeping!  
Men, women, children, beat upon the gates  
That guard our happy world. They could not sleep.  
Titania, must not that be terrible,  
When mortals cannot sleep?

## TITANIA

Yet one night more  
Dear Robin Hood has opened the gates wide  
And their poor weary souls can enter in.

## OBERON

Yet one night more we woodland elves may steal  
Out thro' the gates. I fear the time will come  
When they must close for ever; and we no more  
Shall hold our Sherwood revels.

## TITANIA

Only love  
And love's kind sacrifice can open them.  
For when a mortal hurts himself to help  
Another, then he thrusts the gates wide open  
Between his world and ours.

## OBERON

Ay; but that's rare,  
That kind of love, Titania, for the gates  
Are almost always closed.

## TITANIA

Yet one night more!

Hark, how the fairy host begins to sing  
 Within the gates. Wait here and we shall see  
 What weary souls by grace of Robin Hood  
 This night shall enter Dreamland. See, they come!  
 [The soft light deepens in the hollow among the ferns and the ivory  
   gates of Dreamland are seen swinging open. The fairy  
   host is heard, singing to invite the mortals to enter.]

[Song of the fairies.]

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer! The  
 Forest shall conquer!

Your world is growing old;  
 But a Princess sleeps in the greenwood,  
 Whose hair is brighter than gold.

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer! The  
 Forest shall conquer!

O hearts that bleed and burn,  
 Her lips are redder than roses,  
 Who sleeps in the faëry fern.

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer! The  
 Forest shall conquer!

By the Beauty that wakes anew  
 Milk-white with the fragrant hawthorn  
 In the drip of the dawn-red dew.

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer! The  
 Forest shall conquer!

O hearts that are weary of pain,  
 Come back to your home in Faërie  
 And wait till she wakes again.

[The victims of the forest-laws steal out of the thicket once more—  
 dark, distorted, lame, blind, serfs with iron collars round  
 their necks, old men, women and children; and as the  
 fairy song breaks into chorus they pass in procession  
 thro' the beautiful gates. The gates slowly close. The  
 fairy song is heard as dying away in the distance.]

## TITANIA

[Coming out into the glade and holding up her hands to the evening star beyond the tree-tops.]

Shine, shine, dear star of Love, yet one night more.

SCENE II. A banqueting hall in FITZWALTER'S castle. The guests are assembling for the betrothal feast of ROBIN and MARIAN. Some of ROBIN HOOD'S men, clad in Lincoln green, are just arriving at the doors. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF runs forward to greet them. .

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Come in, my scraps of Lincoln green; come in,  
 My slips of greenwood. You're much wanted here!  
 Head, heart and eyes, we are all pent up in walls  
 Of stone—nothing but walls on every side—  
 And not a rose to break them—big blind walls,  
 Neat smooth stone walls! Come in, my ragged robins;  
 Come in, my jolly minions of the moon,  
 My straggling hazel-boughs! Hey, bully friar,  
 Come in, my knotted oak! Ho, little Much,  
 Come in, my sweet green linnet. Come, my cushats,  
 Larks, yellow-hammers, fern-owls, Oh, come in,  
 Come in, my Dian's foresters, and drown us  
 With may, with blossoming may!

## FITZWALTER

Out, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!  
 Welcome, welcome, good friends of Huntingdon,  
 Or Robin Hood, by whatsoever name  
 You best may love him.

## CRIES

Robin! Robin! Robin!

[Enter ROBIN HOOD.]

## FITZWALTER

Robin, so be it! Myself I am right glad  
To call him at this bright betrothal feast  
My son.

[*Lays a hand on ROBIN's shoulder.*]

Yet, though I would not cast a cloud  
Across our happy gathering, you'll forgive  
An old man and a father if he sees  
All your glad faces thro' a summer mist  
Of sadness.

## ROBIN

Sadness? Yes, I understand.

## FITZWALTER

No, Robin, no, you cannot understand.

## ROBIN

Where's Marian?

## FITZWALTER

Ay, that's all you think of, boy.  
But I must say a word to all of you  
Before she comes.

## ROBIN

Why—what? . . .

## FITZWALTER

No need to look

So startled; but it is no secret here;  
For many of you are sharers of his wild  
Adventures. Now I hoped an end had come  
To these, until another rumour reached me,  
This very day, of yet another prank.  
You know, you know, how perilous a road  
My Marian must ride if Huntingdon  
Tramples the forest-laws beneath his heel  
And, in the thin disguise of Robin Hood,

Succours the Saxon outlaws, makes his house  
A refuge for them, lavishes his wealth  
To feed their sick and needy.

[*The Sheriff and two of his men appear in the great doorway out of sight of the guests.*]

SHERIFF

[*Whispering.*]

Not yet! keep back!

One of you go—see that the guards are set!  
He must not slip us.

FITZWALTER

Oh, I know his heart

Is gold, but this is not an age of gold;  
And those who have must keep, or lose the power  
Even to help themselves. No—he must doff  
His green disguise of Robin Hood for ever,  
And wear his natural coat of Huntingdon.

ROBIN

Ah, which is the disguise? Day after day  
We rise and put our social armour on,  
A different mask for every friend; but steel  
Always to case our hearts. We are all so wrapped,  
So swathed, so muffled in habitual thought  
That now I swear we do not know our souls  
Or bodies from their winding-sheets; but Custom,  
Custom, the great god Custom, all day long  
Shovels the dirt upon us where we lie  
Buried alive and dreaming that we stand  
Upright and royal. Sir, I have great doubts  
About this world, doubts if we have the right  
To sit down here for this betrothal feast  
And gorge ourselves with plenty, when we know  
That for the scraps and crumbs which we let fall  
And never miss, children would kiss our hands  
And women weep in gratitude. Suppose  
A man fell wounded at your gates, you'd not

Pass on and smile and leave him there to die.  
 And can a few short miles of distance blind you?  
 Miles, nay, a furlong is enough to close  
 The gates of mercy. Must we thrust our hands  
 Into the wounds before we can believe?  
 Oh, is our sight so thick and gross? We came,  
 We saw, we conquered with the Conqueror.  
 We gave ourselves broad lands; and when our king  
 Desired a wider hunting ground we set  
 Hundreds of Saxon homes a-blaze and tossed  
 Women and children back into the fire  
 If they but wrung their hands against our will.  
 And so we made our forest, and its leaves  
 Were pitiful, more pitiful than man.  
 They gave our homeless victims the same refuge  
 And happy hiding place they give the birds  
 And foxes. Then we made our forest-laws,  
 And he that dared to hunt, even for food,  
 Even on the ground where we had burned his hut,  
 The ground we had drenched with his own kindred's blood,  
 Poor foolish churl, why, we put out his eyes  
 With red-hot irons, cut off both his hands,  
 Torture him with such horrors that . . . Christ God,  
 How can I help but fight against it all?

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, gossips, if the Conqueror had but burned  
 Everything with four walls, hut, castle, palace,  
 And turned the whole wide world into a forest,  
 Drenched us with may, we might be happy then!  
 With sweet blue wood-smoke curling thro' the boughs,  
 And just a pigeon's flap to break the silence,  
 And ferns, of course, there's much to make men happy.  
 Well, well, the forest conquers at the last!  
 I saw a thistle in the castle courtyard,  
 A purple thistle breaking thro' the pavement,  
 Yesterday; and it's wonderful how soon  
 Some creepers pick these old grey walls to pieces.  
 These nunneries and these monasteries now,  
 They don't spring up like flowers, so I suppose  
 Old mother Nature wins the race at last.

## FITZWALTER

Robin, my heart is with you, but I know  
A hundred ages will not change this earth.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*With a candle in his hand.*]

Gossip, suppose the sun goes out like this.  
Pouf!

[*Blows it out.*]

Stranger things have happened.

## FITZWALTER

Silence, fool!

So, if you share your wealth with all the world  
Earth will be none the better, and my poor girl  
Will suffer for it. Where you got the gold  
You have already lavished on the poor  
Heaven knows.

## FRIAR TUCK

Oh, by the mass and the sweet moon  
Of Sherwood, so do I? That's none so hard  
A riddle!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, Friar Tuck, we know, we know!  
Under the hawthorn bough, and at the foot  
Of rainbows, that's where fairies hide their gold.  
Cut me a silver penny out of the moon  
Next time you're there.

[*Whispers.*]

Now tell me, have you brought  
Your quarter-staff?

## FRIAR TUCK

[*Whispering.*]

Hush! hush.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oh, mum's the word!

I see it!

## FITZWALTER

Believe me, Robin, there's one way  
 And only one—patience! When Lion-Heart  
 Comes home from the Crusade, he will not brook  
 This blot upon our chivalry. Prince John  
 Is dangerous to a heart like yours. Beware  
 Of rousing him. Meanwhile, your troth holds good;  
 But, till the King comes home from the Crusade  
 You must not claim your bride.

## ROBIN

So be it, then. . . .  
 When the great King comes home from the Crusade! . . .

## FITZWALTER

Meanwhile for Marian's sake and mine, I pray  
 Do nothing rash.

[Enter WIDOW SCARLET. *She goes up to ROBIN HOOD.*]

## WIDOW SCARLET

Are you that Robin Hood  
 They call the poor man's friend?

## ROBIN

I am.

## WIDOW SCARLET

They told me,  
 They told me I should find you here. They told me!

## ROBIN

Come, mother, what's the trouble?

## WIDOW SCARLET

Sir, my son

Will Scarlet lies in gaol at Nottingham  
 For killing deer in Sherwood! Sir, they'll hang him.  
 He only wanted food for him and me!  
 They'll kill him, I tell you, they'll kill him. I can't help  
 Crying it out. He's all I have, all! Save him!  
 I'll pray for you, I'll . . .

## ROBIN

[To FITZWALTER, as he raises WIDOW SCARLET gently to her feet.]

Sir, has not the King  
Come home from the Crusade? Does not your heart  
Fling open wide its gates to welcome him?

## FITZWALTER

Robin, you set me riddles. Follow your conscience.  
Do what seems best.

## ROBIN

I hope there is a way,  
Mother. I knew Will Scarlet. Better heart  
There never beat beneath a leather jerkin.  
He loved the forest and the forest loves him;  
And if the lads that wear the forest's livery  
Of living green should happen to break out  
And save Will Scarlet (as on my soul I swear,  
Mother, they shall!) why, that's a matter none  
Shall answer for to prince, or king, or God,  
But you and Robin Hood; and if the judgment  
Strike harder upon us than the heavenly smile  
Of sunshine thro' the greenwood, may it fall  
Upon my head alone.

[Enter the SHERIFF, with two of his men.]

## SHERIFF

[Reads.]

In the King's name!

Thou, Earl of Huntingdon, by virtue of this writ art hereby  
attainted and deprived of thine earldom, thy lands and all thy  
goods and chattels whatsoever and whereas thou hast at divers  
times trespassed against the officers of the king by force of  
arms, thou art hereby outlawed and banished the realm.

## ROBIN

That's well.

[*He laughs.*]

It puts an end to the great question  
Of how I shall dispose my wealth, Fitzwalter.  
But "banished"?—No! that is beyond their power  
While I have power to breathe, unless they banish  
The kind old oaks of Sherwood. They may call it  
"Outlawed," perhaps.

## FITZWALTER

Who let the villain in

Thro' doors of mine?

## CRIES

Out with him! Out with him!

[*The guests draw swords and the SHERIFF retreats thro' the doorway with his men.*]

## ROBIN

Stop!

Put up your swords! He had his work to do.

[*WIDOW SCARLET falls sobbing at his feet.*]

## WIDOW SCARLET

O master, master, who will save my son,  
My son?

## ROBIN

[*Raising her.*]

Why, mother, this is but a dream,

This poor fantastic strutting show of law!  
And you shall wake with us in Sherwood Forest  
And find Will Scarlet in your arms again.  
Come, cheerly, cheerly, we shall overcome  
All this. Hark!

[*A bugle sounds in the distance. There is a scuffle in the doorway and LITTLE JOHN bursts in with his head bleeding.*]

## LITTLE JOHN

Master, master, come away!  
 They are setting a trap for thee, drawing their lines  
 All round the castle.

## ROBIN

How now, Little John,  
 They have wounded thee! Art hurt?

## LITTLE JOHN

No, no, that's nothing.  
 Only a bloody cockscomb. Come, be swift,  
 Or, if thou wert a fox, thou'dst never slip  
 Between 'em. Ah, hear that?

*[Another bugle sounds from another direction.]*

That's number two.

Two sides cut off already. When the third  
 Sounds—they will have thee, sure as eggs is eggs.  
 Prince John is there, Fitzwalter cannot save 'ee.  
 They'll burn the castle down.

## ROBIN

Prince John is there?

## LITTLE JOHN

Ay, and my lord Fitzwalter had best look  
 Well to my mistress Marian, if these ears  
 Heard right as I came creeping thro' their lines.  
 Look well to her, my lord, look well to her.  
 Come, master, come, for God's sake, come away.

## FITZWALTER

Robin, this is thy rashness. I warned thee, boy!  
 Prince John! Nay, that's too perilous a jest  
 For even a prince to play with me. Come, Robin,  
 You must away and quickly.

ROBIN

Let me have

One word with Marian.

LITTLE JOHN

It would be the last

On earth. Come, if you ever wish to see  
Her face again.

FITZWALTER

Come, Robin, are you mad?

You'll bring us all to ruin!

*[He opens a little door in the wall.]*

The secret passage,

This brings you out by Much the Miller's wheel,  
Thro' an otter's burrow in the river bank.

Come, quick, or you'll destroy us! Take this lanthorn.

If you're in danger, slip into the stream

And let it carry you down into the heart

Of Sherwood. Come now, quickly, you must go!

ROBIN

The old cave, lads, in Sherwood, you know where  
To find me. Friar Tuck, bring Widow Scarlet  
Thither to-morrow, with a word or two  
From Lady Marian!

FITZWALTER

Quickly, quickly, go.

*[He pushes ROBIN and LITTLE JOHN into the opening and shuts  
the door. A pause.]*

Oh, I shall pay for this, this cursed folly!

Henceforth I swear I wash my hands of him!

*[Enter MARIAN, from a door on the right above the banqueting  
hall. She pauses, pale and frightened, on the broad  
steps leading down.]*

MARIAN

Father, where's Robin?

FITZWALTER

Child, I bade you stay  
Until I called you.

MARIAN

Something frightened me!  
Father, where's Robin? Where's Robin?

FITZWALTER

Hush, Marian, hark!  
[All stand listening.]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[Stealing to the foot of the stairs and whispering to LADY MARIAN.]  
Lady, they're all so silent now. I'll tell you  
I had a dream last night—there was a man  
That bled to death, because of four grey walls  
And a black-hooded nun.

FITZWALTER

[Angrily.]

Hist, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

[The third bugle sounds. There is a clamour at the doors.  
Enter PRINCE JOHN and his retainers.]

JOHN

[Mockingly.]

Now this is fortunate! I come in time  
To see—Oh, what a picture! Lady Marian,  
Forgive me—coming suddenly out of the dark  
And seeing you there, robed in that dazzling white  
Above these verdant gentlemen, I feel  
Like one that greets the gracious evening star  
Thro' a gap in a great wood.

Is aught amiss?

Why are you all so silent? Ah, my good,  
My brave Fitzwalter, I most fervently  
Trust I am not inopportune.

FITZWALTER

My lord,

I am glad that you can jest. I am sadly grieved  
And sorely disappointed in that youth  
Who has incurred your own displeasure.

JOHN

Ah?

Your future son-in-law?

FITZWALTER

Never on earth!

He is outlawed—

MARIAN

Outlawed!

FITZWALTER

And I wash my hands  
Of Huntingdon. His shadow shall not darken  
My doors again!

JOHN

That's vehement! Ha! ha!  
And what does Lady Marian say?

MARIAN

My father

Speaks hastily. I am not so unworthy.

FITZWALTER

Unworthy?

MARIAN

Yes, unworthy as to desert him  
Because he is in trouble—the bravest man  
In England since the days of Hereward.  
You know why he is outlawed!

FITZWALTER

[*To PRINCE JOHN.*]

Sir, she speaks

As the spoilt child of her old father's dotage.  
Give her no heed. She shall not meet with him  
On earth again, and till she promise this,  
She'll sun herself within the castle garden  
And never cross the draw-bridge.

MARIAN

The moat!

Then I'll swim

FRIAR TUCK

**Ha! ha! well spoken.**

MARIAN

Father, you quite forget there is a King;  
And, when the King comes home from the Crusade,  
Will you forget Prince John and change once more?

[*Murmurs of assent from the FORESTERS.*]

JOHN

Enough of this.

Though I be prince, I am vice-gerent too!  
Fitzwalter, I would have some private talk  
With you and Lady Marian. Bid your guests  
Remove a little—

FITZWALTER

I'll lead them all within!  
And let them make what cheer they may. Come, friends.

[*He leads them up the stairs to the inner room.*]

My lord, I shall return immediately!

[*Exeunt FITZWALTER and the guests.*]

JOHN

Marian!

MARIAN

My lord!

JOHN

*[Drawing close to her.]*

I have come to urge a plea  
On your behalf as well as on my own!  
Listen, you may not know it—I must tell you.  
I have watched your beauty growing like a flower,  
With—why should I not say it—worship; yes,  
Marian, I will not hide it.

MARIAN

Sir, you are mad!

Sir, and your bride, your bride, not three months wedded!  
You cannot mean . . .

JOHN

Listen to me! Ah, Marian,  
You'd be more merciful if you knew all!  
D'you think that princes wed to please themselves?

MARIAN

Sir, English maidens do; and I am plighted  
Not to a prince, but to an outlawed man.

JOHN

Listen to me! One word! Marian, one word!  
I never meant you harm! Indeed, what harm  
Could come of this? Is not your father poor?  
I'd make him rich! Is not your lover outlawed?  
I'd save him from the certain death that waits him.  
You say the forest-laws afflict your soul  
And his—you say you'd die for their repeal!  
Well—I'll repeal them. All the churls in England  
Shall bless your name and mix it in their prayers  
With heaven itself.

MARIAN

The price?

JOHN

You call it that!

To let me lay the world before your feet,  
To let me take this little hand in mine.  
Why should I hide my love from you?

MARIAN

No more,

I'll hear no more! You are a prince, you say?

JOHN

One word—suppose it some small sacrifice,  
To save those churls for whom you say your heart  
Bleeds; yet you will not lift your little finger  
To save them! And what hinders you?—A breath,  
A dream, a golden rule! Can you not break it  
For a much greater end?

MARIAN

I'd die to save them.

JOHN

Then live to save them.

MARIAN

No, you will not let me;  
D'you think that bartering my soul will help  
To save another? If there's no way but this,  
Then through my lips those suffering hundreds cry,  
We choose the suffering. All that is good in them,  
All you have left, all you have not destroyed,  
Cries out against you: and I'll go to them,  
Suffer and toil and love and die with them  
Rather than touch your hand. You over-rate  
Your power to hurt our souls. You are mistaken!  
There is a golden rule!

JOHN

And with such lips  
You take to preaching! I was a fool to worry  
Your soul with reason. With hair like yours—it's hopeless!  
But Marian—you shall hear me.

[*He catches her in his arms.*]

Marian, you shall! I love you. Yes, by God,

MARIAN

[*Struggling.*]

You should not live!

JOHN

One kiss, then! Devil take it.

[*Enter FITZWALTER above.*]

MARIAN

[*Wresting herself free.*]

You should not live!

Were I a man and not a helpless girl  
You should not live!

JOHN

Come, now, that's very wicked.  
See how these murderous words affright your father.  
My good Fitzwalter, there's no need to look  
So ghastly. For your sake and hers and mine  
I have been trying to make your girl forget  
The name of Huntingdon. A few short months  
At our gay court would blot his memory out!  
I promise her a life of dazzling pleasures,  
And, in return she flies at me—a tigress—  
Clamouring for my blood! Try to persuade her!

FITZWALTER

My lord, you are very good. She must decide  
Herself.

JOHN

[*Angrily.*]

I'll not be trifled with! I hold  
 The hand of friendship out and you evade it.  
 The moment I am gone, back comes your outlaw.  
 You say you have no power with your own child!  
 Well, then I'll take her back this very night;  
 Back to the court with me. How do I know  
 What treasons you are hatching here? I'll take her  
 As hostage for yourself.

FITZWALTER

My lord, you jest!  
 I have sworn to you.

JOHN

No more! If you be loyal,  
 What cause have you to fear?

FITZWALTER

My lord, I'll give  
 A hundred other pledges; but not this.

JOHN

By heaven, will you dictate your terms to me?  
 I say that she shall come back to the court  
 This very night! Ho, there, my men.

[Enter JOHN'S retainers.]

Escort

This lady back with us.

FITZWALTER

Back there, keep back. Prince or no prince,  
 I say she shall not go!

[He draws his sword.]

I'd rather see her  
 Begging in rags with outlawed Huntingdon  
 Than that one finger of yours should soil her glove.

## JOHN

So here's an end of fawning, here's the truth,  
My old white-bearded hypocrite. Come, take her,  
Waste no more time. Let not the old fool daunt you  
With that great skewer.

## FITZWALTER

[As JOHN's men advance.]

By God, since you will have it,  
Since you will drive me to my last resort,  
Break down my walls, and hound me to the forest,  
This is the truth! Out of my gates! Ho, help!  
A Robin Hood! A Robin Hood!

[*There is a clamour from the upper room. The doors are flung open and the FORESTERS appear at the head of the steps.*]

## FRIAR TUCK

[*Coming down into the hall and brandishing his quarter-staff.*]  
A Robin?

Who calls on Robin Hood? His men are here  
To answer.

## FITZWALTER

Drive these villains out of my gates.

## FRIAR TUCK

[*To PRINCE JOHN.*]

Sir, I perceive you are a man of wisdom,  
So let me counsel you. There's not a lad  
Up yonder, but at four-score yards can shoot  
A swallow on the wing. They have drunken deep.  
I cannot answer but their hands might loose  
Their shafts before they know it. Now shall I give  
The word? Ready, my lads!

[*The FORESTERS make ready to shoot. JOHN hesitates for a moment.*

## JOHN

My Lady Marian,  
One word, and then I'll take my leave of you!

[*She pays no heed.*]

Farewell, then! I have five-score men at hand!  
And they shall be but lightning to the hell  
Of my revenge, Fitzwalter. I will not leave  
One stone upon another. From this night's work  
Shall God Himself not save you.

[*Exeunt JOHN and his men.*]

## FRIAR TUCK

[*As they go out.*]

My Lord Fitzwalter!  
I have confessed him! Shall I bid 'em shoot?  
'Twill save a world of trouble.

## FITZWALTER

No; or the King  
Himself will come against me. Follow them out,  
Drive them out of my gates, then raise the drawbridge  
And let none cross. Oh, I foresaw, foretold!  
Robin has wrecked us all!

[*Exeunt the FORESTERS and FITZWALTER. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF remains alone with MARIAN.*]

## MARIAN

[*She flings herself down on a couch and buries her head in her arms.*]

O Robin, Robin,  
I cannot lose you now!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Sitting at her feet. The lights grow dim.*]

Ah, well, the prince  
Promised to break the walls down. Don't you think  
These villains are a sort of ploughshare, lady,  
And where they plough, who knows what wheat may spring!

The lights are burning low and very low;  
So, Lady Marian, let me tell my dream.  
There was a forester that bled to death  
Because of four grey walls and a black nun  
Whose face I could not see—but, oh, beware!  
Though I am but your fool, your Shadow-of-a-Leaf,  
Dancing before the wild winds of the future,  
I feel them thrilling through my tattered wits  
Long ere your wisdom feels them. My poor brain  
Is like a harp hung in a willow-tree  
Swept by the winds of fate. I am but a fool,  
But oh, beware of that black-hooded nun.

## MARIAN

This is no time for jesting, Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

The lights are burning low. Do you not feel  
A cold breath on your face?

## MARIAN

Fling back that shutter!

Look out and tell me what is happening.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Flinging back the shutter.*]

Look,

Look, gossip, how the moon comes dancing in.  
Ah, they have driven Prince John across the drawbridge.  
They are raising it, now!

[*There are cries in the distance, then a heavy sound of chains clanking and silence.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF turns from the window and stands in the stream of moonlight, pointing to the door on the left.]

Look! Look!

MARIAN

[Starting up with a cry of fear.]

Ah!

[The tall figure of a nun glides into the moonlit hall and throwing back her hood reveals the face of QUEEN ELINOR.]

ELINOR

Lady Marion,

Tell me quickly, where is Huntingdon hiding?

MARIAN

The Queen!

ELINOR

Yes! Yes! I donned this uncouth garb  
To pass through your besiegers. If Prince John  
Discover it, all is lost. Come, tell me quickly,  
Where is Robin?

MARIAN

Escaped, I hope.

ELINOR

Not here?

MARIAN

No!

ELINOR

Come, dear Lady Marian, do not doubt me.  
I am here to save you both.

MARIAN

He is not here.

ELINOR

Ah, but you know where I may find him, Marian.  
All will be lost if you delay to tell me  
Where I may speak with him. He is in peril.  
By dawn Prince John will have five hundred men

Beleaguered the castle. You are all ruined  
Unless you trust me! Armies will scour the woods  
To hunt him down. Even now he may be wounded,  
Helpless to save himself.

MARIAN

Wounded!

ELINOR

Dear child,

Take me to him. Here, on this holy cross,  
My mother's dying gift, I swear to you  
I wish to save him.

MARIAN

Oh, but how?

ELINOR

Trust me!

MARIAN

Wounded! He may be wounded! Oh, if I could,  
I'd go to him! I am helpless, imprisoned here.  
My father . . .

ELINOR

I alone can save your father.  
Give me your word that if I can persuade him,  
You'll lead me to your lover's hiding place,  
And let me speak with him.

[Enter FITZWALTER.]

Ah, my Lord Fitzwalter!

FITZWALTER

The queen! O madam, madam, I am driven  
Beyond myself. This girl, this foolish girl  
Has brought us all to ruin. This Huntingdon,  
As I foresaw, foresaw, foretold, foretold,  
Has dragged me down with him.

ELINOR

I am on your side,  
If you will hear me; and you yet may gain  
A son in Robin Hood.

FITZWALTER

Madam, I swear  
I have done with him. I pray you do not jest;  
But if you'll use your power to save my lands . . . .  
I was provoked! . . . .  
Prince John required this child here—

ELINOR

Oh, I know!  
But you'll forgive him that! I do not wonder  
That loveliness like hers—

FITZWALTER

Ay, but you'll pardon  
A father's natural anger. Madam, I swear  
I was indeed provoked. But you'll assure him  
I've washed my hands of Huntingdon.

MARIAN

And yet  
His men are, even now, guarding your walls!  
Father, you cannot, you shall not—

FITZWALTER

Oh, be silent!  
Who wrapt me in this tangle? Are you bent  
On driving me out in my old age to seek  
Shelter in caves and woods?

ELINOR

My good Fitzwalter,  
It has not come to that! If you will trust me  
All will be well; but I must speak a word  
With Robin Hood.

FITZWALTER

You!

ELINOR

Oh, I have a reason.

Your daughter knows his hiding place.

FITZWALTER

She knows!

ELINOR

Oh, trust them both for that. I am risking much!  
To-morrow she shall guide me there. This bird  
Being flown, trust me to make your peace with John.

FITZWALTER

But—Marian!

ELINOR

She'll be safer far with Robin,  
Than loitering here until your roof-tree burns.  
I think you know it. Fitzwalter, I can save you,  
I swear it on this cross.

FITZWALTER

But—Marian! Marian!

ELINOR

Your castle wrapt in flame! . . . There's nought to fear.  
If she could—Marian, once, at a court masque,  
You wore a page's dress of Lincoln green,  
And a green hood that muffed half your face,  
I could have sworn 'twas Robin come again—  
He was my page, you know—  
Wear it to-morrow—go, child, bid your maid  
Make ready—we'll set out betimes.

## MARIAN

[*Going up to her father.*]

I'll go,

If you will let me, father. He may be wounded!  
Father, forgive me. Let me go to him.

## ELINOR

Go, child, first do my bidding. He'll consent  
When you return.

[*Exit MARIAN.*]

My dear good friend Fitzwalter,  
Trust me, I have some power with Huntingdon.  
All shall be as you wish. I'll let her guide me,  
But—as for her—she shall not even see him  
Unless you wish. Trust me to wind them all  
Around my little finger.

## FITZWALTER

It is dark here.

Let us within. Madam, I think you are right.  
And you'll persuade Prince John?

## ELINOR

[*As they go up the steps.*]

I swear by this,

This holy cross, my mother's dying gift!

## FITZWALTER

It's very sure he'd burn the castle down.

[*Exeunt.*]

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Coming out into the moonlight and staring up after them.*]  
The nun! The nun! They'll whip me if I speak,  
For I am only Shadow-of-a Leaf, the Fool.

[*Curtain.*]

## ACT II

SCENE I. *Sherwood Forest: An open glade, showing on the right the mouth of the outlaw's cave. It is about sunset. The giant figure of LITTLE JOHN comes out of the cave, singing.*

## LITTLE JOHN

[*Sings.*]

When Spring comes back to England  
And crowns her brows with may,  
Round the merry moonlit world  
She goes the greenwood way.

[*He stops and calls in stentorian tones.*]

Much! Much! Much! Where has he vanished now,  
Where has that monstrous giant the miller's son  
Hidden himself?

[Enter MUCH, a dwarf-like figure, carrying a large bundle of ferns.]

## MUCH

Hush, hush, child, here I am!  
And here's our fairy feather-beds, ha! ha!  
Come, praise me, praise me, for a thoughtful parent.  
There's nothing makes a better bed than ferns  
Either for sleeping sound or rosy dreams.

## LITTLE JOHN

Take care the fern-seed that the fairies use  
Get not among thy yellow locks, my Titan,  
Or thou'l wake up invisible. There's none  
Too much of Much already.

## MUCH

[*Looking up at him impudently.*]

It would take  
Our big barn full of fern-seed, I misdoubt,  
To make thee walk invisible, Little John,  
My sweet Tom Thumb! And, in this troublous age

Of forest-laws, if we night-walking minions,  
 We gentlemen of the moon, could only hunt  
 Invisible, there's many and many of us  
 With thumbs lopped off, eyes gutted and legs pruned,  
 Slick, like poor pollarded pear-trees, would be lying  
 Happy and whole this day beneath the boughs.

### LITTLE JOHN

Invisible? Ay, but what would Jenny say  
 To such a ghostly midge as thou would'st be  
 Sipping invisibly at her cherry lips.

### MUCH

Why, there now, that's a teaser. E'en as it is  
 (Don't joke about it) my poor Jenny takes  
 The smallness of her Much sorely to heart!  
 And though I often tell her half a loaf  
 (Ground in our mill) is better than no bread,  
 She weeps, poor thing, that an impartial heaven  
 Bestows on her so small a crumb of bliss  
 As me! You'd scarce believe, now, half the nostrums,  
 Possets and strangely nasty herbal juices  
 That girl has made me gulp, in the vain hope  
 That I, the frog, should swell to an ox like thee.  
 I tell her it's all in vain, and she still cheats  
 Her fancy and swears I've grown well nigh three feet  
 Already. O Lord, she's desperate. She'll advance  
 Right inward to the sources of creation,  
 She'll take the reins of the world in hand. She'll stop  
 The sun like Joshua, turn the moon to blood,  
 And if I have to swallow half the herbs  
 In Sherwood, I shall stalk a giant yet,  
 Shoulder to shoulder with thee, Little John,  
 And crack thy head at quarter-staff. But don't,  
 Don't joke about it. 'Tis a serious matter.

### LITTLE JOHN

Into the cave, then, with thy feather-bed.  
 Old Much, thy father, waits thee there to make  
 A table of green turfs for Robin Hood.

We shall have guests anon, O merry times,  
Baron and Knight and abbot, all that ride  
Through Sherwood, all shall come and dine with him  
When they have paid their toll! Old Much is there  
Growling at thy delay.

## MUCH

[*Going towards the cave.*]

O, my poor father.

Now, there's a sad thing, too. He is so ashamed  
Of his descendants. Why for some nine years  
He shut his eyes whenever he looked at me;  
And I have seen him on the village green  
Pretend to a stranger, once, who badgered him  
With curious questions, that I was the son  
Of poor old Gaffer Bramble, the lame sexton.  
That self-same afternoon, up comes old Bramble  
White hair a-blaze and big red wagging nose  
All shaking with the palsy; bangs our door  
Clean off its hinges with his crab-tree crutch,  
And stands there—framed—against the sunset sky!  
He stretches out one quivering fore-finger  
At father, like the great Destroying Angel  
In the stained window: straight, the milk boiled over,  
The cat ran, baby squalled and mother screeched.  
Old Bramble asks my father—what—what—what  
He meant—he meant—he meant! You should have seen  
My father's hopeless face! Lord, how he blushed,  
Red as a beet-root! Lord, Lord, how he blushed!  
'Tis a hard business when a parent looks  
Askance upon his offspring.

[*Exit into the cave.*]

## LITTLE JOHN

Skip, you chatterer!

Here comes our master.

[*Enter ROBIN HOOD.*]

Master, where hast thou been?

I feared some harm had come to thee. What's this?  
This was a cloth-yard shaft that tore thy coat!

## ROBIN

Oh, ay, they barked my shoulder, devil take them.  
 I got it on the borders of the wood.  
 St. Nicholas, my lad, they're on the watch.

## LITTLE JOHN

What didst thou there? They're on the watch, i' faith!  
 A squirrel could not pass them. Why, my namesake  
 Prince John would sell his soul to get thy head,  
 And both his ears for Lady Marian;  
 And whether his ears or soul be worth the more,  
 I know not. When the first lark flittered up  
 To sing, at dawn, I woke; and thou wast gone.  
 What didst thou there?

## ROBIN

Well, first I went to swim  
 In the deep pool below the mill.

## LITTLE JOHN

I swam  
 Enough last night to last me many a day.  
 What then?

## ROBIN

I could not wash away the thought  
 Of all you told me. If Prince John should dare!  
 That helpless girl! No, no, I will not think it.  
 Why, Little John, I went and tried to shoot  
 A grey goose wing thro' Lady Marian's casement.

## LITTLE JOHN

Oh, ay, and a pink nosegay tied beneath it.  
 Now, master, you'll forgive your Little John,—  
 But that's midsummer madness and the may  
 Is only half in flower as yet. But why—  
 You are wounded—why are you so pale?

## ROBIN

No--no--

Not wounded; but oh, my good faithful friend,  
 She is not there! I wished to send her warning.  
 I could not creep much closer; but I swear  
 I think the castle is in the hands of John.  
 I saw some men upon the battlements,  
 Not hers—I know—not hers!

## LITTLE JOHN

Hist, who comes here?

[*He seizes his bow and stands ready to shoot.*]

## ROBIN

Stop, man, it is the fool. Thank God, the fool,  
 Shadow-of-a-Leaf, my Marian's dainty fool.  
 How now, good fool, what news? What news?

[*Enter SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.*]

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Good fool!

Should I be bad, sir, if I chanced to bring  
 No news at all? That is the wise man's way.  
 Thank heaven, I've lost my wits. I am but a leaf  
 Dancing upon the wild winds of the world,  
 A prophet blown before them. Well, this evening,  
 It is that lovely grey wind from the West  
 That silvers all the fields and all the seas,  
 And I'm the herald of May!

## ROBIN

Come, Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

I pray thee, do not jest.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I do not jest.

I am vaunt-courier to a gentleman,  
 A sweet slim page in Lincoln green who comes,  
 Wood-knife on hip, and wild rose in his face,

With golden news of Marian. Oh, his news  
 Is one crammed honeycomb, swelling with sweetness  
 In twenty thousand cells; but delicate!  
 So send thy man aside.

## ROBIN

Go, Little John.

[LITTLE JOHN goes into the cave.]  
 Well, Shadow-of-a-Leaf, where is he?

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

At this moment

His hair is tangled in a rose bush: hark,  
 He swears, like a young leopard! Nay, he is free.  
 Come, master page, here is that thief of love,  
 Give him your message. I'll to Little John.

[Exit into the cave. Enter MARIAN, as a page in Lincoln green,  
 her face muffled in a hood.]

## ROBIN

Good even, master page, what is thy news  
 Of Lady Marian?

[She stands silent.]

Answer me quickly, come,  
 Hide not thy face!

[She still stands muffled and silent.]

Come, boy, the fool is chartered,  
 Not thou; and I'll break off this hazel switch  
 And make thee dance if thou not answer me.  
 What? Silent still? Sirrah, this hazel wand  
 Shall lace thee till thou tingle, top to toe.  
 I'll . . .

## MARIAN

[Unmuffling.]

Robin!

## ROBIN

[Catches her in his arms with a cry.]  
 Marian! Marian!

## MARIAN

Robin, you did not know me.

Fie upon you,

## ROBIN

[Embracing her.]

Ten thousand miles away. This is not moonlight,  
And I am not Endymion. Could I dream  
My Dian would come wandering through the fern  
Before the sunset? Even that rose your face  
You muffled in its own green leaves.

Oh, you seemed

## MARIAN

But you,

Were hidden in the heart of Sherwood, Robin,  
Hidden behind a million mighty boughs,  
And yet I found you.

## ROBIN

Ay, the young moon stole  
In pity down to her poor shepherd boy;  
But he could never climb the fleecy clouds  
Up to her throne, never could print one kiss  
On her immortal lips. He lay asleep  
Among the poppies and the crags of Latmos,  
And she came down to him, his queen stole down.

## MARIAN

Oh, Robin, first a rose and then a moon,  
A rose that breaks at a breath and falls to your feet,  
The fickle moon—Oh, hide me from the world;  
For there they say love goes by the same law!  
Let me be outlawed then. I cannot change.  
Sweetheart, sweetheart, Prince John will hunt me down!  
Prince John—Queen Elinor will hunt me down!

## ROBIN

Queen Elinor! Nay, but tell me what this means?  
How came you here?

## MARIAN

The Queen—she came last night,  
 Made it an odious kind of praise to me  
 That he, not three months wedded to his bride,  
 Should—pah!

And then she said five hundred men  
 Were watching round the borders of the wood;  
 But she herself would take me safely through them,  
 Said that I should be safer here with Robin,  
 She had your name so pat—and I gave way.

[Enter QUEEN ELINOR behind. *She conceals herself to listen.*]

## ROBIN

Marian, she might have trapped you to Prince John.

## MARIAN

No; no; I think she wanted me to guide her  
 Here to your hiding place. She wished to see you  
 Herself, unknown to John, I know not why.  
 It was my only way. Her skilful tongue  
 Quite won my father over, made him think,  
 Poor father, clinging to his lands again,  
 He yet might save them. And so, without ado  
 (It will be greatly to the joy of Much,  
 Your funny little man), I bade my maid  
 Jenny, go pack her small belongings up  
 This morning, and to follow with Friar Tuck  
 And Widow Scarlet. They'll be here anon.

## ROBIN

Where did you leave the Queen?

## MARIAN

Robin, she tried  
 To kill me! We were deep within the wood  
 And she began to tell me a wild tale,  
 Saying that I reminded her of days  
 When Robin was her page, and how you came  
 To Court, a breath of April in her life,

And how you worshipped her, and how she grew  
To love you. But she saw you loved me best  
(So would she mix her gall and lies with honey),  
So she would let you go. And then she tried  
To turn my heart against you, bade me think  
Of all the perils of your outlawry,  
Then flamed with anger when she found my heart  
Steadfast; and when I told her we drew nigh  
The cave, she bade me wait and let her come  
First, here, to speak with you. Some devil's trick  
Gleamed in her smile, the way some women have  
Of smiling with their lips, wreathing the skin  
In pleasant ripples, laughing with their teeth,  
While the cold eyes watch, cruel as a snake's  
That fascinates a bird. I'd not obey her.  
She whipped a dagger out. Had it not been  
For Shadow-of-a-Leaf, who dogged us all the way,  
Poor faithful fool, and leapt out at her hand,  
She would have killed me. Then she darted away  
Like a wild thing into the woods, trying to find  
Your hiding place most like.

## ROBIN

O Marian, why,

Why did you trust her? Listen, who comes here?

[Enter FRIAR TUCK, JENNY and WIDOW SCARLET.]

Ah, Friar Tuck!

## MARIAN

Good Jenny!

## ROBIN

And Widow Scarlet!

## FRIAR TUCK

O children, children, this is thirsty weather!  
The heads I have cracked, the ribs I have thwacked, the bones  
I have bashed with my good quarter-staff, to bring  
These bits of womankind through Sherwood Forest.

ROBIN

What, was there scuffling, friar?

FRIAR TUCK

Some two or three

Pounced on us, ha! ha! ha!

JENNY

A score at least,

Mistress, most unchaste ruffians.

FRIAR TUCK

They've gone home,

Well chastened by the Church. This pastoral staff

Mine oaken *Pax Vobiscum*, sent 'em home

To think about their sins, with watering eyes.

You never saw a bunch of such blue faces,

Bumpy and juicy as a bunch of grapes

Bruised in a Bacchanalian orgy, dripping

The reddest wine a man could wish to see.

ROBIN

I picture it—those big brown hands of thine

Grape-gathering at their throttles, ha! ha! ha!

Come, Widow Scarlet, come, look not so sad.

WIDOW SCARLET

O master, master, they have named the day

For killing of my boy.

ROBIN

They have named the day

For setting of him free, then, my good dame.

Be not afraid. We shall be there, eh, Friar?

Grape-gathering, eh?

FRIAR

Thou'l not be there thyself

My son, the game's too dangerous now, methinks.

## ROBIN

I shall be there myself. The game's too good  
To lose. We'll all be there. You're not afraid,  
Marian, to spend a few short hours alone  
Here in the woods with Jenny.

## MARIAN

Not for myself,

Robin.

## ROBIN

We shall want every hand that day,  
And you'll be safe enough. You know we go  
Disguised as gaping yokels, old blind men,  
With patches on their eyes, poor wandering beggars.  
Pedlars with pins and poking-sticks to sell;  
And when the time is come—a merry blast  
Rings out upon a bugle and suddenly  
The Sheriff is aware that Sherwood Forest  
Has thrust its green boughs up beneath his feet.  
Off go the cloaks and all is Lincoln green,  
Great thwacking clubs and twanging bows of yew.  
Oh, we break up like nature thro' the laws  
Of that dark world; and then, good Widow Scarlet,  
Back to the cave we come and your good Will  
Winds his big arm about you once again.  
Go, Friar, take her in and make her cosy.  
Jenny, your Much will grow three feet at least  
With joy to welcome you. He is in the cave.

[*FRIAR TUCK and WIDOW SCARLET go towards the cave.*]

## FRIAR TUCK

Now for a good bowse at a drinking can.  
I've got one cooling in the cave, unless  
That rascal, Little John, has drunk it all.

[*Exeunt into cave.*]

## JENNY

[*To MARIAN.*]

Mistress, I haven't spoke a word to you  
For nigh three hours. 'Tis most unkind, I think.

MARIAN

Go, little tyrant, and be kind to Much.

JENNY

Mistress, it isn't Much I want. Don't think  
Jenny comes trapesing through these awful woods  
For Much. I haven't spoke a word with you  
For nigh three hours. 'Tis most unkind, I think.

MARIAN

Wait, Jenny, then, I'll come and talk with you.  
Robin, she is a tyrant; but she loves me.  
And if I do not go, she'll pout and sulk  
Three days on end. But she's a wondrous girl.  
She'd work until she dropped for me. Poor Jenny!

ROBIN

That's a quaint tyranny. Go, dear Marian, go;  
But not for long. We have so much to say.  
Come quickly back.

[*Exit MARIAN.* ROBIN paces thoughtfully across the glade.

QUEEN ELINOR steals out of her hiding place and  
stands before him.]

You here!

ELINOR

Robin, can you  
Believe that girl? Am I so treacherous?

ROBIN

It seems you have heard whate'er I had to say.

ELINOR

Surely you cannot quite forget those days  
When you were kind to me. Do you remember  
The sunset through that oriel?

## ROBIN

Ay, a god  
Grinning thro' a horse-collar at a pitiful page,  
Dazed with the first red gleam of what he thought  
Life, as the trouveres find it! I am ashamed,  
Remembering how your quick tears blinded me!

## ELINOR

Ashamed! You—you—that in my bitter grief  
When Rosamund—

## ROBIN

I know! I thought your woes,  
Those tawdry relics of your treacheries,  
Wrongs quite unparalleled. I would have fought  
Roland himself to prove you spotless then.

## ELINOR

Oh, you speak thus to me! Robin, beware!  
I have come to you, I have trampled on my pride,  
Set all on this one cast! If you should now  
Reject me, humble me to the dust before  
That girl, beware! I never forget, I warn you;  
I never forgive.

## ROBIN

Are you so proud of that?

## ELINOR

Ah, well, forgive me, Robin. I'll save you yet  
From all these troubles of your outlawry!  
Trust me—for I can wind my poor Prince John  
Around my little finger. Who knows—with me  
To help you—there are but my two sons' lives  
That greatly hinder it—why, yourself might reign  
Upon the throne of England.

ROBIN

Are you so wrapped  
In treacheries, helplessly false, even to yourself,  
That now you do not know falsehood from truth,  
Darkness from light?

ELINOR

O Robin, I was true  
At least to you. If I were false to others,  
At least I—

ROBIN

No—not that—that sickening plea  
Of truth in treachery. Treachery cannot live  
With truth. The soul wherein they are wedded dies  
Of leprosy.

ELINOR

*[Coming closer to him.]*

Have you no pity, Robin,  
No kinder word than this for the poor creature  
That crept—Ah, feel my heart, feel how it beats!  
No pity?

ROBIN

Five years ago this might have moved me!

ELINOR

No pity?

ROBIN

None. There is no more to say.  
My men shall guide you safely through the wood.

ELINOR

I never forgive!

*[Enter MARIAN from the cave; she stands silent and startled.]*

## ROBIN

My men shall guide you back.  
[Calls.]

Ho, there, my lads!

[Enter several of the OUTLAWS.]

Back thro' the wood.

This lady needs a guide

## ELINOR

Good-bye, then, Robin, and good-bye to you,  
Sweet mistress! You have wronged me! What of that?  
For—when we meet—Come, lead on, foresters!

[Exeunt the QUEEN and her guides.]

## MARIAN

O Robin, Robin, how the clouds begin  
To gather—how that woman seems to have brought  
A nightmare on these woods.

## ROBIN

Forget it all!

She is so tangled in those lies the world  
Draws round some men and women, none can help her.  
Marian, for God's sake, let us quite forget  
That nightmare! Oh, that perfect brow of yours,  
Those perfect eyes, pure as the violet wells  
That only mirror heaven and are not dimmed  
Except by clouds that drift thro' heaven and catch  
God's glory in the sunset and the dawn.

## MARIAN

It is enough for them simply to speak  
The love they hold for you. But—I still fear.  
Robin—think you—she might have overheard  
Your plan—the rescue of Will Scarlet?

## ROBIN

Why—

No—No—some time had passed, and yet—she seemed  
 To have heard your charge against her! No, she guessed it.  
 Come—let us brush these cobwebs from our minds.  
 Look how the first white star begins to tremble  
 Like a big blossom in that sycamore.  
 Now you shall hear our forest ritual.  
 Ho, Little John! Summon the lads together!

[*The OUTLAWS come out of the cave. LITTLE JOHN blows a bugle and others come in from the forest.*]

Friar, read us the rules.

## FRIAR TUCK

First, shall no man  
 Presume to call our Robin Hood or any  
 By name of Earl, lord, baron, knight or squire,  
 But simply by their names as men and brothers:  
 Second, that Lady Marian while she shares  
 Our outlaw life in Sherwood shall be called  
 Simply Maid Marian. Thirdly, we that follow  
 Robin, shall never in thought or word or deed  
 Do harm to widow, wife or maid; but hold,  
 Each, for his mother's or sister's or sweetheart's sake,  
 The glory of womanhood, a sacred thing,  
 A star twixt earth and heaven. Fourth, whomsoever  
 Ye meet in Sherwood ye shall bring to dine  
 With Robin, saving carriers, posts and folk  
 That ride with food to serve the market towns  
 Or any, indeed, that serve their fellow men.  
 Fifth, you shall never do the poor man wrong,  
 Nor spare a priest or usurer. You shall take  
 The waste wealth of the rich to help the poor,  
 The baron's gold to stock the widow's cupboard,  
 The naked ye shall clothe, the hungry feed,  
 And lastly shall defend with all your power  
 All that are trampled under by the world,  
 The old, the sick and all men in distress.

## ROBIN

So, if it be no dream, we shall at last  
 Hasten the kingdom of God's will on earth.  
 There shall be no more talk of rich and poor,  
 Norman and Saxon. We shall be one people,  
 One family, clustering all with happy hands  
 And faces round that glowing hearth, the sun.  
 Now let the bugle sound a golden challenge  
 To the great world. Greenleaf, a forest call!

[REYNOLD GREENLEAF *blows a resounding call.*]

Now let the guards be set; and then, to sleep!  
 To-morrow there'll be work enough for all.  
 The hut for Jenny and Maid Marian!  
 Come, you shall see how what we lack in halls  
 We find in bowers. Look how from every branch  
 Such tapestries as kings could never buy  
 Wave in the starlight. You'll be waked at dawn  
 By feathered choirs whose notes were taught in heaven.

## MUCH

Come, Jenny, come, we must prepare the hut  
 For Mistress Marian. Here's a bundle of ferns!  
 [They go into the hut. *The light is growing dimmer and richer.*]

## LITTLE JOHN

And here's a red cramoisy cloak, a baron  
 [Handing them in at the door.]  
 Dropt, as he fled one night from Robin Hood;  
 And here's a green, and here's a midnight blue,  
 All soft as down. But wait, I'll get you more.  
 [Two of the OUTLAWS appear at the door with deerskins. SHADOW-  
 OF-A-LEAF stands behind them with a great bunch of  
 flowers and ferns.]

## FIRST OUTLAW

Here's fawn-skins, milder than a maiden's cheek.

## SHADOW-OFA-LEAF

Oh, you should talk in rhyme! The world should sing  
 Just for this once in tune, if Love were king!

## SECOND OUTLAW

Here's deer-skins, for a carpet, smooth and meek.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I knew you would! Ha! ha! Now look at what I bring!

[*He throws flowers into the hut, spray by spray, speaking in a kind of ecstasy.*]

Here's lavender and love and sweet wild thyme,  
And dreams and blue-bells that the fairies chime,  
Here's meadow-sweet and moonlight, bound in posies,  
With ragged robin, traveller's joy and roses,  
And here—just three leaves from a weeping willow;  
And here—that's best—deep poppies for your pillow.

## MUCH

And here's a pillow that I made myself,  
Stuffed with dry rose-leaves and grey pigeon's down,  
The softest thing on earth except my heart!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Going aside and throwing himself down among the ferns to watch.*] Just three sweet breaths and then the song is flown!

[*MUCH looks at him for a moment with a puzzled face, then turns to the hut again.*]

## MUCH

Jenny, here, take it—though I'm fond of comforts,  
Take it and give it to Maid Marian.

## JENNY

Why, Much, 'tis bigger than thyself.

## MUCH

Hush, child.

I meant to use it lengthways. 'Twould have made  
A feather-bed complete for your poor Much,  
Take it!

[*The OUTLAWS all go into the cave.*]

## MARIAN

O Robin, what a fairy palace!  
 How cold and grey the walls of castles seem  
 Beside your forest's fragrant halls and bowers.  
 I do not think that I shall be afraid  
 To sleep this night, as I have often been  
 Beneath our square bleak battlements.

## ROBIN

And look,

Between the boughs, there is your guard, all night,  
 That great white star, white as an angel's wings,  
 White as the star that shone on Bethlehem!  
 Good-night, sweetheart, good-night!

## MARIAN

Good-night!

## ROBIN

One kiss!

Oh, clear bright eyes, dear heavens of sweeter stars,  
 Where angels play, and your own sweeter soul  
 Smiles like a child into the face of God,  
 Good-night! Good-night!

[*MARIAN goes into the hut. The door is shut. ROBIN goes to the mouth of the cave and throws himself down on a couch of deerskins. The light grows dimly rich and fairy-like.*]

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Rising to his knees.*]

Here comes the little cloud!

[*A little moonlit cloud comes floating down between the tree-tops into the glade. TITANIA is seen reposing upon it. She steps to earth. The cloud melts away.*]

How blows the wind from fairyland, Titania?

## TITANIA

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the wicked queen has heard  
 Your master's plan for saving poor Will Scarlet.  
 She knows Maid Marian will be left alone,  
 Unguarded in these woods. The wicked Prince  
 Will steal upon her loneliness. He plots  
 To carry her away.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

What can we do?  
 Can I not break my fairy vows and tell?

## TITANIA

No, no; you cannot, even if you would,  
 Convey our fairy lore to mortal ears.  
 When have they heard our honeysuckle bugles  
 Blowing reveille to the crimson dawn?  
 We can but speak by dreams; and, if you spoke,  
 They'd whip you, for your words would all ring false  
 Like sweet bells out of tune.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

What can we do?

## TITANIA

Nothing, except on pain of death, to stay  
 The course of Time and Tide. There's Oberon!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oberon!

## TITANIA

He can tell you more than I.  
 [Enter OBERON.]

## OBERON

Where's Orchis? Where's our fairy trumpeter  
 To call the court together?

## ORCHIS

Here, my liege.

## OBERON

Bugle them hither; let thy red cheeks puff  
Until thy curled petallic trumpet thrill  
More loudly than a yellow-banded bee  
Thro' all the clover clumps and boughs of thyme.  
They are scattered far abroad.

## ORCHIS

My liege, it shall

Outroar the very wasp!

[*Exit.*]

## OBERON

*[As he speaks, the fairies come flocking from all sides into the glade.]*

Methinks they grow  
Too fond of feasting. As I passed this way  
I saw the fairy halls of hollowed oaks  
All lighted with their pale green glow-worm lamps.  
And under great festoons of maiden-hair  
Their brilliant mushroom tables groaned with food.  
Hundreds of rose-winged fairies banqueted!  
All Sherwood glittered with their prismy goblets  
Brimming the thrice refined and luscious dew  
Not only of our own most purplest violets,  
But of strange fragrance, wild exotic nectars,  
Drawn from the fairy blossoms of some star  
Beyond our tree-tops! Ay, beyond that moon  
Which is our natural limit—the big lamp  
Heaven lights upon our boundary.

## ORCHIS

Mighty King,

The Court is all attendant on thy word.

## OBERON

[*With great dignity.*]

Elves, pixies, nixies, gnomes and leprechauns,  
 [He pauses.]

We are met, this moonlight, for momentous councils  
 Concerning those two drowsy human lovers,  
 Maid Marian and her outlawed Robin Hood.  
 They are in dire peril; yet we may not break  
 Our vows of silence. Many a time  
 Has Robin Hood by kindly words and deeds  
 Done in his human world, sent a new breath  
 Of life and joy like Spring to fairyland;  
 And at the moth-hour of this very dew-fall,  
 He saved a fairy, whom he thought, poor soul,  
 Only a may-fly in a spider's web,  
 He saved her from the clutches of that Wizard,  
 That Cruel Thing, that dark old Mystery,  
 Whom ye all know and shrink from—

[*Exclamations of horror from the fairies.*]

Plucked her forth,  
 So gently that not one bright rainbow gleam  
 Upon her wings was clouded, not one flake  
 Of bloom brushed off—there lies the broken web.  
 Go, look at it; and here is pale Perilla  
 To tell you all the tale.

[*The fairies cluster to look at the web, etc.*]

## A FAIRY

Can we not make them free  
 Of fairyland, like Shadow-of-a-Leaf, to come  
 And go, at will, upon the wings of dreams?

## OBERON

Not till they lose their wits like Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Can I not break my fairy vows and tell?

## OBERON

Only on pain of what we fairies call  
Death!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Death?

## OBERON

Never to join our happy revels,  
Never to pass the gates of fairyland  
Again, but die like mortals. What that means  
We do not know—who knows?

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

If I could save them!—

I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

## OBERON

There is a King  
Beyond the seas. If he came home in time,  
All might be well. We fairies only catch  
Stray gleams, wandering shadows of things to come.

## TITANIA

Oh, if the King came home from the Crusade!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Why will he fight for graves beyond the sea?

## OBERON

Our elfin couriers brought the news at dusk  
That Lion-Heart, while wandering home thro' Europe,  
In jet-black armour, like an errant knight,  
Despite the great red cross upon his shield,  
Was captured by some wicked prince and thrust  
Into a dungeon. Only a song, they say,  
Can break those prison-bars There is a minstrel

That loves his King. If he should roam the world  
Singing until from that dark tower he hears  
The King reply, the King would be set free.

## TITANIA

Only a song, only a minstrel?

## OBERON

Ay;

And Blondel is his name.

[*A long, low sound of wailing is heard in the distance. The fairies shudder and creep together.*]

## TITANIA

Hark, what is that?

## OBERON

The cry of the poor, the cry of the oppressed,  
The sound of women weeping for their children,  
The victims of the forest laws. The moan  
Of that dark world where mortals live and die  
Sweeps like an icy wind thro' fairyland.  
And oh, it may grow bitterer yet, that sound!  
'Twas Merlin's darkest prophecy that earth  
Should all be wrapped in smoke and fire, the woods  
Hewn down, the flowers discoloured and the sun  
Begrimed, until the rows of lifeless trees  
Against the greasy sunset seemed no more  
Than sooty smudges of an ogre's thumbs  
Upon the sweating forehead of a slave.  
While, all night long, fed with the souls of men,  
And bodies, too, great forges blast and burn  
Till the great ogre's cauldrons brim with gold.

[*The wailing sound is heard again in the distance.*]

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

To be shut out for ever, only to hear  
Those cries! I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the fool,  
I cannot face it! Is there no hope but this?  
No hope for Robin and Maid Marian?

## OBERON

If the great King comes home from the Crusade  
In time! If not,—there is another King  
Beyond the world, they say.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Death, that dark death!  
To leave the sunlight and the flowers for ever!  
I cannot bear it! Oh, I cannot tell them.  
I'll wait—perhaps the great King will come home,  
If not—Oh, hark, a wandering minstrel's voice?

## OBERON

Who is drawing hither? Listen, fairies, listen!  
[Song heard approaching thro' the wood.]

Knight on the narrow way,  
Where wouldest thou ride?  
“Onward,” I heard him say,  
“Love, to thy side!”

“Nay,” sang a bird above;  
“Stay, for I see  
Death in the mask of love,  
Waiting for thee.”

[The song breaks off. Enter a MINSTREL, leading a great white steed. He pauses, confronted by the fairy host. The moonlight dazzles him.] -

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Minstrel, art thou, too, free of fairyland?  
Where wouldest thou ride? What is thy name?

## MINSTREL

Is Blondel. My name

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF  
Blondel!

## THE FAIRIES

Blondel!

## MINSTREL

And I ride

Through all the world to seek and find my King!

[*He passes through the fairy host and goes into the woods on the further side of the glade, continuing his song, which dies away in the distance.*]

[Song.]

“Death? What is death?” he cried.

“I must ride on,  
On to my true love’s side,  
Up to her throne!”

[Curtain.]

## ACT III

SCENE I. *May-day. An open place (near NOTTINGHAM). A crowd of rustics and townsfolk assembling to see the execution of WILL SCARLET.*

## FIRST RUSTIC

A sad may-day! Where yonder gallows glowers,  
We should have raised the may-pole.

## SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, no songs,

No kisses in the ring, no country dances  
To-day; no lads and lasses on the green,  
Crowning their queen of may.

[Enter ROBIN HOOD, disguised as an old beggar, with a green patch on one eye.]

## ROBIN

Is this the place,  
Masters, where they’re a-goin’ to hang Will Scarlet?

## FIRST RUSTIC

Ay, father, more's the pity.

## ROBIN

Eh! Don't ye think  
There may be scuffling, masters? There's a many  
That seems to like him well, here, roundabouts.

## SECOND RUSTIC

Too many halberts round him. There's no chance.

## ROBIN

I've heard the forest might break out, the lads  
In Lincoln green, you wot of! If they did?

## FIRST RUSTIC

There's many here would swing a cudgel and help  
To trip the Sheriff up. If Robin Hood  
Were only here! But then he's outlawed now.

## SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, and there's big rewards out. It would be  
Sure death for him to try a rescue now.  
The biggest patch of Lincoln Green we'll see  
This day, is that same patch on thy old eye,  
Eh, lads!

## THIRD RUSTIC

What's more, they say Prince John is out  
This very day, scouring thro' Sherwood forest  
In quest of Lady Marian!

## ROBIN

[Sharply.]

You heard that? .

## THIRD RUSTIC

Ay, for they say she's flown to Sherwood forest.

## SECOND RUSTIC

Ah! Ah? That's why he went. I saw Prince John!  
 With these same eyes I saw him riding out  
 To Sherwood, not an hour ago.

## ROBIN

You saw him?

## SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, and he only took three men at arms.

## FIRST RUSTIC

Three men at arms! Why then, he must ha' known  
 That Robin's men would all be busy here!  
 He's none so bold, he would not risk his skin!  
 I think there'll be some scuffling after all.

## ROBIN

Ay, tell 'em so—go, spread it thro' the crowd!

*[He mutters to himself.]*

He'd take some time, to find her, but 'fore God  
 We must be quick; 'fore God we must be quick!

## SECOND RUSTIC

Why, father, one would never think to see thee  
 Thou had'st so sound a heart!

## FIRST RUSTIC

Ah, here they come!

The Sheriff and his men; and, in the midst,  
 There's poor Will Scarlet bound.

## THE CROWD MURMURS

Ah, here they come!

Look at the halberts shining! Can you see him?

## FIRST RUSTIC

There, there he is. His face is white: but, Lord,  
He takes it bravely.

## SECOND RUSTIC

He's a brave man, Will.

## SHERIFF

Back with the crowd there, guards; delay no time!

## SOME WOMEN IN THE CROWD

Ah, ah, poor lad!

## ROBIN

[*Eagerly.*]

What are they doing now?

I cannot see!

## FIRST RUSTIC

The Sheriff's angered now!

## SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, for they say a messenger has come  
From that same godless hangman whose lean neck  
I'd like to twist, saying he is delayed.  
'Tis the first godly deed he has ever done.

## THIRD RUSTIC

The Sheriff says he will not be delayed.  
But who will take the hangman's office?

## ROBIN

Masters,

I have a thought; make way; let me bespeak  
The Sheriff!

## RUSTICS

How now, father, what's to do?

ROBIN

Make way, I tell you. Here's the man they want!

SHERIFF

What's this?

ROBIN

Good master Sheriff, I've a grudge  
Against Will Scarlet. Let me have the task  
Of sending him to heaven!

CROWD

Ah-h-h, the old devil!

SHERIFF

Come on, then, and be brief!

ROBIN

I'm not a hangman;  
But I can cleave your thinnest hazel wand  
At sixty yards.

SHERIFF

Shoot, then, and make an end.  
Make way there, clear the way!  
[An opening is made in the crowd. ROBIN stands in the gap,  
WILL SCARLET is not seen by the audience.]

CROWD

Ah-h-h, the old devil!

ROBIN

I'll shoot him one on either side, just graze him,  
To show you how I love him; then the third  
Slick in his heart.

[He shoots. A murmur goes up from the crowd. The crowd  
hides WILL SCARLET during the shooting. But ROBIN  
remains in full view, in the opening.]

SHERIFF

[Angrily.]

Take care! You've cut the cord  
That bound him on that side!

ROBIN

Then here's the second!

I will be careful!

[*He takes a steady aim.*]

### A RUSTIC TO HIS NEIGHBOURS

I' faith, lads, he can shoot!

What do you think—that green patch on his eye

Smacks of the merry men! He's tricking them!

[ROBIN shoots. *A louder murmur goes up from the crowd.*]

SHERIFF

You have cut the rope again!

A CRY

He has cut him free!

ROBIN

All right! All right! It's just to tease the dog!

Here's for the third now!

[*He aims and shoots quickly. There is a loud cry of a wounded man; then a shout from the crowd.*]

### THE CROWD

Ah-h-h, he has missed; he has killed

One of the guards!

FIRST RUSTIC

What has he done?

SECOND RUSTIC

He has killed

One of the Sheriff's men!

SHERIFF

There's treachery here!  
I'll cleave the first man's heart that moves!

ROBIN

Will Scarlet,  
Pick up that dead man's halbert!

SHERIFF

Treachery! Help!  
Down with the villain!

ROBIN

[*Throws off his beggar's crouch and hurls the SHERIFF and several of his men back amongst the crowd. His cloak drops off.*] Sherwood! A merry Sherwood!

CROWD

Ah! ha! The Lincoln Green! A Robin Hood!

[*A bugle rings out and immediately some of the yokels throw off their disguise and the Lincoln green appears as by magic amongst the crowd. The guards are rushed and hustled by them. Robin and several of his men make a ring round WILL SCARLET.*]

SHERIFF

It is the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon:  
There is a great reward upon his head.  
Down with him!

[*The SHERIFF's men make a rush at the little band. A KNIGHT in jet black armour, with a red-cross shield, suddenly appears and forces his way through the mob, sword in hand.*]

KNIGHT

What, so many against so few!  
Back, you wild wolves. Now, foresters, follow me,  
For our St. George and merry England, charge,  
Charge them, my lads!

[*The FORESTERS make a rush with him and the SHERIFF and his men take to flight.*]

ROBIN

Now back to Sherwood, swiftly!

A horse, or I shall come too late; a horse!

[*He sees the Knight in armour standing by his horse.*] Your pardon, sir; our debt to you is great, Too great almost for thanks; but if you be Bound by the vows of chivalry, I pray you Lend me your charger; and my men will bring you To my poor home in Sherwood. There you'll find A most abundant gratitude.

KNIGHT

Your name?

ROBIN

Was Huntingdon; but now is Robin Hood.

KNIGHT

If I refuse?

ROBIN

Then, sir, I must perforce

Take it. I am an outlaw, but the law Of manhood still constrains me—'tis a matter Of life and death—

KNIGHT

Take it and God be with you!

I'll follow you to Sherwood with your men.

[*ROBIN seizes the horse, leaps to the saddle, and gallops away.*]

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE II. *Sherwood Forest. Outside the cave. JENNY, MARIAN and WIDOW SCARLET.*

MARIAN

This dreadful waiting! How I wish that Robin Had listened to the rest and stayed with me. How still the woods are! Jenny, do you think

There will be fighting? Oh, I am selfish, mother;  
 You need not be afraid. Robin will bring  
 Will Scarlet safely back to Sherwood. Why,  
 Perhaps they are all returning even now!  
 Cheer up! How long d'you think they've been away,  
 Jenny, six hours or more? The sun is high,  
 And all the dew is gone.

## JENNY

Nay, scarce three hours.

Now don't you keep a-fretting. They'll be back,  
 Quite soon enough. I've scarcely spoke with you,  
 This last three days and more; and even now  
 It seems I cannot get you to myself,  
 Two's quite enough.

[To WIDOW SCARLET.]

Come, widow, come with me.

I'll give you my own corner in the hut  
 And make you cosy. If you take a nap  
 Will Scarlet will be here betimes you wake.

[Takes her to the hut and shuts her in.]  
 There, drat her, for a mumping mumble-crust!

## MARIAN

Come, Jenny, that's too bad; the poor old dame  
 Is lonely.

## JENNY

She's not lonely when she sleeps,  
 And if I never get you to myself  
 Where was the good of trapesing after you  
 And living here in Sherwood like wild rabbits?  
 You ha'nt so much as let me comb your hair  
 This last three days and more.

## MARIAN

Well, comb it, Jenny,  
 Now, if you like, and comb it all day long;  
 But don't get crabbed, and don't speak so crossly!

[JENNY begins loosening MARIAN'S hair and combing it.]

## JENNY

Why, Mistress, it grows longer every day.  
It's far below your knees, and how it shines!  
And wavy, just like Much the Miller's brook,  
Where it comes tumbling out into the sun,  
Like gold, red gold.

## MARIAN

Ah, that's provoking, Jenny,  
For you forgot to bring me my steel glass,  
And, if you chatter so, I shall soon want it.

## JENNY

I've found a very good one at a pinch.  
There's a smooth silver pool, down in the stream,  
Where you can see your face most beautiful.

## MARIAN

So that's how Jenny spends her lonely hours,  
A sad female Narcissus, while poor Much  
Dwines to an Echo!

## JENNY

I don't like those gods.

I never cared for them. But, as for Much,  
Much is the best of all the merry men.  
And, mistress, O, he speaks so beautifully,  
It *might* be just an Echo from blue hills  
Far, far away! You see he's quite a scholar:  
Much, more an' most (That's what he calls the three  
Greasy caparisons—much, more an' most)!  
You see they thought that being so very small  
They could not make him grow to be a man,  
They'd make a scholar of him instead. The Friar  
Taught him his letters. He can write his name,  
And mine, and yours, just like a missal book,  
In lovely colours; and he always draws  
The first big letter of JENNY like a tree  
With naked Cupids hiding in the branches.

Mistress, I don't believe you hear one word  
I ever speak to you! Your eyes are always  
That far and far away.

MARIAN

I'm listening, Jenny!

JENNY

Well, when he draws the first big M of yours,  
He makes it like a bridge from earth to heaven,  
With white-winged angels passing up and down;  
And, underneath the bridge, in a black stream,  
He puts the drowning face of the bad Prince  
Holding his wicked hands out, while a devil  
Stands on the bank and with a pointed stake  
Keeps him from landing—

Ah, what's that? What's that?

MARIAN

O Jenny, how you startled me!

JENNY

I thought

I saw that same face peering thro' the ferns  
Yonder—there—see, they are shaking still.

[*She screams.*]

Ah! Ah!

[PRINCE JOHN and another man appear advancing across the  
glade.]

JOHN

So here's my dainty tigress in her den,  
And—Warman—there's a pretty scrap for you  
Beside her. Now, sweet mistress, will you deign  
To come with me, to change these cheerless woods  
For something queenlier? If I be not mistaken,  
You have had time to tire of that dark cave.  
Was I not right, now? Surely you can see

Those tresses were not meant to waste their gold  
Upon this desert. Nay, but Marian, hear me.  
I do not jest.

[At a sign from MARIAN, JENNY goes quickly inside the cave.]  
That's well! Dismiss your maid!

Warman, remove a little.

[His man retires.]

I see you think

A little better of me! Out in the wood  
There waits a palfrey for you, and the stirrup  
Longs, as I long, to clasp your dainty foot.  
I am very sure by this you must be tired  
Of outlawry, a lovely maid like you.

[He draws nearer.]

MARIAN

Wait—I must think, must think.

JOHN

Give me your hand!

Why do you shrink from me? If you could know  
The fire that burns me night and day, you would not  
Refuse to let me snatch one cooling kiss  
From that white hand of yours.

MARIAN

If you be prince,

You will respect my loneliness and go.

JOHN

How can I leave you, when by day and night  
I see that face of yours.  
I'll not pretend  
I do not love you, do not long for you,  
Desire and hunger for your kiss, your touch!  
I'll not pretend to be a saint, you see!  
I hunger and thirst for you. Marian, Marian.

MARIAN

You are mad!

JOHN

Ay, mad for you.

Body and soul

I am broken up with love for you. Your eyes  
 Flash like the eyes of a tigress, and I love them  
 The better for it.

Ah, do not shrink from me!

[JENNY comes out of the cave and hands MARIAN a bow. She  
 leaps back and aims it at JOHN.]

MARIAN

Back, you wild beast, or by the heaven above us,  
 I'll kill you! Now, don't doubt me. I can shoot  
 Truly as any forester. I swear,  
 Prince or no prince, king or no king, I'll kill you  
 If you should stir one step from where you stand.

JOHN

Come, come, sweet Marian, put that weapon down.  
 I was beside myself, was carried away.  
 I cannot help my love for—

MARIAN

I'll not hear  
 Another sickening word: throw down your arms,  
 That dagger at your side.

JOHN

Oh, that's too foolish,  
 Marian, I swear—

MARIAN

You see that rusty stain  
 Upon the silver birch down yonder? Watch.

[She shoots. Then swiftly aims at him again.]

Now, throw your weapon down.

[He pulls out the dagger and throws it down, with a shrug of his  
 shoulders. One of his men steals up behind MARIAN.]

JENNY

Ah, Mistress Marian,

There's one behind you! Look!

*[The man springs forward and seizes MARIAN's arms.]*

JOHN

*[Coming forward and taking hold of her also.]*

So, my sweet tigress,

You're trapped then, are you? Well, we'll waste no time!

We'll talk this over when we reach the castle.

Keep off the maid, there, Warman; I can manage

This turbulent beauty. Ah, by God, you shall

Come! Ah? God's blood, what's this?

*[MARIAN has succeeded in drawing her dagger and slightly wounding him. She wrests herself free.]*

MARIAN

Keep back, I warn you!

JOHN

*[Advancing slowly.]*Strike, now strike if you will. You will not like  
To see the red blood spurting up your hand.

That's not maid's work. Come, strike!

*[ROBIN HOOD appears at the edge of the glade behind him]*

You see, you cannot!

Your heart is tenderer than you think.

ROBIN

*[Quietly.]*

Prince John!

JOHN

*[Turns round and confronts ROBIN.]*

Out with your blade, Warman; call up the rest!

We can strike freely now, without a fear

Of marring the sweet beauty of the spoil.

We four can surely make an end of him.

Have at him, lads, and swiftly, or the thieves  
Will all be down on us.

[ROBIN draws his sword and sets his back to an oak. The other two followers of PRINCE JOHN come out of the wood.]

### ROBIN

Come on, all four!

This oak will shift its roots before I budge  
One inch from four such howling wolves. Come on;  
You must be tired of fighting women-folk.  
Come on! By God, sir, you must guard your head  
Better than that,

[He disarms WARMAN.]

Or you're just food for worms  
Already; come, you dogs!

### PRINCE JOHN

Work round, you three,  
Behind him! Drive him out from that damned oak!

### ROBIN

Oh, that's a princely speech! Have at you, sir!

[He strikes PRINCE JOHN'S sword out of his hand and turns suddenly to confront the others. JOHN picks up a dagger and makes as if to stab ROBIN in the back. At the same instant, bugles are heard in the distance. The red-cross knight flashes between the trees and seizing JOHN'S arm in his gauntleted hand, disarms him, then turns to help ROBIN.]

### KNIGHT

What, four on one! Down with your blades, you curs,  
Or, by Mahound!—

[The three men take to flight. JOHN stands staring at the newcomer. The FORESTERS appear, surrounding the glade.]

JOHN

[*Muttering.*]

What? Thou? Thou? Or his ghost?

No—no—it cannot be.

ROBIN

Let them yelp home,

The pitiful jackals. They have left behind  
The prime offender. Ha, there, my merry lads,  
All's well; but take this villain into the cave  
And guard him there.

[*The FORESTERS lead PRINCE JOHN into the cave.*]

JOHN

[*To the FORESTERS.*]

Answer me one thing: who

Is yonder red-cross knight?

A FORESTER

No friend of thine,

Whoe'er he be!

KNIGHT

[*To ROBIN.*]

I need not ask *his* name.

I grieve to know it!

ROBIN

Sir, I am much beholden

To your good chivalry. What thanks is mine  
To give, is all your own.

KNIGHT

Then I ask this!

Give me that prisoner! I think his life is mine.

ROBIN

You saved my own, and more, you saved much more  
Than my poor life is worth. But, sir, think well!  
This man is dangerous, not to me alone,  
But to the King of England; for he'll yet  
Usurp the throne! Think well!

KNIGHT

I ask no more.

I have more reasons than you know.

ROBIN

So be it.

Ho! Bring the prisoner back!

[*The FORESTERS bring PRINCE JOHN back. He stares at the KNIGHT as if in fear.*]

Sir, you shall judge him.

This prisoner is your own.

KNIGHT

Then—let him go!

FORESTERS

What! Set him free?

ROBIN

Obey!

[*They release PRINCE JOHN.*]

KNIGHT

Out of my sight;

Go!

PRINCE JOHN

What man is this?

KNIGHT

Quickly, get thee gone!

[*PRINCE JOHN goes out, shaken and white.*]

ROBIN

We'll think no more of him! It is our rule  
That whomsoe'er we meet in merry greenwood  
Should dine with us. Will you not be our guest?

KNIGHT

That's a most happy thought! I have not heard  
A merrier word than dinner all this day.  
I am well-nigh starved.

## ROBIN

Will you not raise your visor  
 And let us know to whose good knightly hand  
 We are so beholden?

## KNIGHT

Sir, you will pardon me,  
 If, for a little, I remain unknown.  
 But, tell me, are you not that Robin Hood  
 Who breaks the forest laws?

## ROBIN

That is my name.

We hold this earth as naturally our own  
 As the glad common air we breathe. We think  
 No man, no king, can so usurp the world  
 As not to give us room to live free lives,  
 But, if you shrink from eating the King's deer—

## KNIGHT

Shrink? Ha! ha! ha! I count it as my own!

[*The FORESTERS appear, preparing the dinner on a table of green turfs, beneath a spreading oak. MARIAN and JENNY appear at the door of the hut. JENNY goes across to help at the preparations for dinner.*]

## ROBIN

Ah, there's my Lady Marian! Will you not come  
 And speak with her?

[*He and the KNIGHT go and talk to MARIAN in the background.*]

## LITTLE JOHN

[*At the table.*]

The trenchers all are set;  
 Manchets of wheat, cream, curds and honey-cakes,  
 Venison pasties, roasted pigeons! Much,  
 Run to the cave; we'll broach our rarest wine  
 To-day. Old Much is waiting for thee there  
 To help him. He is growling roundly, too,  
 At thy delay.

MUCH

[*Going towards the cave.*]

Ah me, my poor old father!

JENNY

I've dressed the salt and strawed the dining hall  
With flowers.

[Enter FRIAR TUCK with several more FORESTERS and WILL SCARLET.]

ROBIN

Ah, good Will Scarlet, here at last!

FRIAR TUCK

We should ha' been here sooner; but these others  
Borrowed a farmer's market cart and galloped  
Ahead of us!

ROBIN

Thy mother is in the hut,  
Sheer broken down with hope and fearfulness,  
Waiting and trembling for thee, Will. Go in,  
Put thy big arm around her.

[WILL SCARLET goes into the hut with a cry.]

SCARLET

Mother!

FRIAR TUCK

You see,

My sons, you couldn't expect the lad to run!  
There is a certain looseness in the limbs,  
A quaking of the flesh that overcomes  
The bravest who has felt a hangman's rope  
Cuddling his neck.

ROBIN

You judge him by the rope

That cuddles your slim waist! Oh, you sweet armful,  
Sit down and pant! I warrant you were glad  
To bear him company.

## FRIAR TUCK

I'll not deny it!

I am a man of solids. Like the Church,  
I am founded on a rock.

[*He sits down.*]

## ROBIN

Solids, i' faith!

Sir, it is true he is partly based on beef;  
He grapples with it squarely; but fluids, too,  
Have played their part in that cathedral choir  
He calls his throat. One godless virtue, sir,  
They seem to have given him. Never a nightingale  
Gurgles jug! jug! in mellower tones than he  
When jugs are flowing. Never a thrush can pipe  
Sweet, sweet, so rarely as, when a pipe of wine  
Summers his throttle, we'll make him sing to us  
One of his heathen ditties—*The Malmsey Butt,*  
*Or Down the Merry Red Lane!*

## FRIAR TUCK

Oh, ay, you laugh,

But, though I cannot run, when I am rested  
I'll challenge you, Robin, to a game of buffets,  
One fair, square, stand-up, stand-still, knock-down blow  
A piece; you'll need no more. If you not kiss  
The turf, at my first clout, I will forego  
Malmsey for ever!

## ROBIN

Friar, I recant;

You're champion there. Fists of a common size  
I will encounter; but not whirling hams  
Like thine!

## FRIAR TUCK

I knew it!

## JENNY

[*Approaching.*]

Please you, sirs, all is ready!

## FRIAR TUCK

Ah, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny, that's good news!

[WILL SCARLET comes out of the hut with his arm round his mother. They all sit down at the table of turfs. Enter SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF timidly.]

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Is there a place for me?

## A FORESTER

Ay, come along!

## FRIAR TUCK

Now, Robin, don't forget the grace, my son.

## ROBIN

[*Standing up.*]

It is our custom, sir, since our repast  
Is borrowed from the King, to drain one cup  
To him, and his return from the Crusade,  
Before we dine. That same wine-bibbing friar  
Calls it our 'grace'; and constitutes himself  
Remembrancer—without a cause, for never  
Have we forgotten, never while bugles ring  
Thro' Sherwood, shall forget—Outlaws, the King!

[*All stand up except the KNIGHT.*]

## CRIES

The King and his return from the Crusade!

[*They drink and resume their seats.*]

## ROBIN

You did not drink the health, sir Knight. I hope  
You hold with Lion-Heart.

## KNIGHT

Yes; I hold with him.

You were too quick for me. I had not drawn  
These gauntlets off.

But tell me, Lady Marian,  
When is your bridal day with Robin Hood?

## MARIAN

We shall be wedded when the King comes home  
From the Crusade.

## KNIGHT

Ah, when the King comes home!  
That's music—all the birds of April sing  
In those four words for me—the King comes home.

## MARIAN

I am glad you love him, sir.

## ROBIN

But you're not eating!  
Your helmet's locked and barred! Will you not raise  
Your visor?

## KNIGHT

[Laughs.]

Ha! ha! ha! You see I am trapped!  
I did not wish to raise it! Hunger and thirst  
Break down all masks and all disguises, Robin.

[*He rises and removes his helmet, revealing the face of RICHARD CŒUR DE LION.*]

## ROBIN

The King!

[*They all leap to their feet.*]

## OUTLAWS

The King! The King!

## ROBIN

But oh, my liege,

I should have known, when we were hard beset  
Around Will Scarlet by their swarming bands,  
And when you rode out of the Eastern sky  
And hurled our foemen down, I should have known  
It was the King come home from the Crusade!

And when I was beset here in the wood  
 By treacherous hands again, I should have known  
 Whose armour suddenly burned between the leaves!  
 I should have known, either it was St. George  
 Or else the King come home from the Crusade!

## RICHARD

Indeed there is one thing that might have told you,  
 Robin—a lover's instinct, since it seems  
 So much for you and Marian depends,  
 On my return.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Sire, you will pardon me,  
 For I am only a fool, and yet methinks  
 You know not half the meaning of those words—  
 The King, the King comes home from the Crusade!  
 Thrust up your swords, heft uppermost, my lads,  
 And shout—the King comes home from the Crusade.  
 [He leaps on a seat, and thrusts up the King's sword, heft uppermost, as if it were a cross.]

## ROBIN

Pardon him, sire, poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf has lost  
 His wits!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

That's what Titania said you'd say,  
 Poor sweet bells out of tune! But oh, don't leave,  
 Don't leave the forest! There's darker things to come!  
 Don't leave the forest! I have wits enough at least  
 To wrap my legs around my neck for warmth  
 On winter nights.

## RICHARD

Well, you've no need to pass  
 The winter in these woods—

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oh, not *that* winter!

## ROBIN

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, be silent!

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF goes aside and throws himself down sobbing among the ferns.]

## RICHARD

When even your cave

Methinks can scarce be cheery. Huntingdon,  
Your earldom we restore to you this day!  
You and my Lady Marian shall return  
To Court with us, where your true bridal troth  
Shall be fulfilled with golden marriage bells.  
Now, friends, the venison pasty! We must hear  
*The Malmsey Butt and Down the Merry Red Lane,*  
Ere we set out, at dawn, for London Town.

## ROBIN

Allan-a-dale shall touch a golden string  
To speed our feast, sire, for he soars above  
The gross needs of the Churchman!

## RICHARD

Allan-a-Dale?

## WILL SCARLET

Our greenwood minstrel, sire! His harp is ours  
Because we won his bride for him.

## RICHARD

His bride?

## REYNOLD GREENLEAF

Was to be wedded, sire, against her will  
Last May, to a rich old baron.

## RICHARD

Pigeon-pie—

And Malmsey—yes—a rich old baron—tell!

## ROBIN

Sire, on the wedding day, my merry men  
 Crowded the aisles with uninvited guests;  
 And, as the old man drew forth the golden ring,  
 They threw aside their cloaks with one great shout  
 Of 'Sherwood'; and, for all its crimson panes,  
 The church was one wild sea of Lincoln green!  
 The Forest had broken in, sire, and the bride  
 Like a wild rose tossing on those green boughs,  
 Was borne away and wedded here by Tuck  
 To her true lover; and so—his harp is ours.

## ALLAN-A-DALE

No feasting song, sire, but the royal theme  
 Of chivalry—a song I made last night  
 In yonder ruined chapel. It is called  
*The Old Knight's Vigil.*

## RICHARD

Our hearts will keep it young!

[*ALLAN-A-DALE sings, SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF raises his head among the ferns.*]

[*Song.*]

## I

Once, in this chapel, Lord  
 Young and undaunted,  
 Over my virgin sword  
 Lightly I chaunted,—  
 "Dawn ends my watch. I go  
 Shining to meet the foe!"

## II

"Swift with thy dawn," I said,  
 "Set the lists ringing!  
 Soon shall thy foe be sped,  
 And the world singing!  
 Bless my bright plume for me,  
 Christ, King of Chivalry.

[*SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF rises to his knees amongst the ferns.*]

## III

"War-worn I kneel to-night,  
 Lord, by Thine altar!  
 Oh, in to-morrow's fight,  
 Let me not falter!  
 Bless my dark arms for me,  
 Christ, King of Chivalry.

## IV

"Keep Thou my broken sword  
 All the long night through  
 While I keep watch and ward!  
 Then—the red fight through,  
 Bless the wrenched haft for me,  
 Christ, King of Chivalry.

## V

"Keep, in thy piercèd hands,  
 Still the bruised helmet:  
 Let not their hostile bands  
 Wholly o'erwhelm it!  
 Bless my poor shield for me,  
 Christ, King of Chivalry.

## VI

"Keep Thou the sullied mail,  
 Lord, that I tender  
 Here, at Thine altar-rail!  
 Then—let Thy splendour  
 Touch it once . . . and I go  
 Stainless to meet the foe."

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF rises to his feet and takes a step towards the minstrel.]

[Curtain.]

## ACT IV

SCENE I. *Garden of the King's Palace.* Enter JOHN and ELINOR.

ELINOR

You will be king the sooner! Not a month  
In England, and my good son Lion-Heart  
Must wander over-seas again. These two,  
Huntingdon and his bride, must bless the star  
Of errant knighthood.

JOHN

He stayed just long enough  
To let them pass one fearless honeymoon  
In the broad sunlight of his royal favour,  
Then, like a meteor off goes great King Richard,  
And leaves them but the shadow of his name  
To shelter them from my revenge. They know it!  
I have seen her shiver like a startled fawn  
And draw him closer, damn him, as I passed.

ELINOR

They would have flitted to the woods again  
But for my Lord Fitzwalter.

JOHN

That old fool  
Has wits enough to know I shall be king,  
And for his land's sake cheats himself to play  
Sir Pandarus of Troy. "Tis wrong, dear daughter,  
To think such evil." Pah, he makes me sick!

ELINOR

Better to laugh. He is useful.

JOHN

If Richard were to perish over-seas!  
I'd—

If I were king!

ELINOR

You'd be king the sooner. Never fear:  
These wandering meteors flash into their graves  
Like lightning, and no thunder follows them  
To warn their foolish henchmen.

JOHN

[*Looking at her searchingly.*]

Shall I risk

The King's return?

ELINOR

What do you mean?

JOHN

I mean

I cannot wait and watch this Robin Hood  
Dangle the fruit of Tantalus before me,  
Then eat it in my sight! I have borne enough!  
He gave me like a fairing to my brother  
In Sherwood Forest; and I now must watch him,  
A happy bridegroom with the happy bride,  
Whose lips I meant for mine.

ELINOR

And do you think

I love to see it?

JOHN

Had it not been for you

He would have died ere this!

ELINOR

Then let him die!

JOHN

Oh, ay, but do you mean it, mother?

ELINOR

God,

I hate him, hate him!

JOHN

Mother, he goes at noon  
 To Sherwood Forest, with a bag of gold  
 For some of his old followers. If, by chance  
 He fall—how saith the Scripture?—among thieves  
 And vanish—is not heard of any more,  
 I think Suspicion scarce could lift her head  
 Among these roses here to hiss at me,  
 When Lion-Heart returns.

ELINOR

Vanish?

JOHN

I would not  
 Kill him too quickly. I would have him taken  
 To a dungeon that I know.

ELINOR

You have laid your trap  
 Already? Tell me. You need not be afraid!  
 I saw them kiss, in the garden, yesternight;  
 And I have wondered, ever since, if fire  
 Could make a brand quite hot enough to stamp  
 My hate upon him.

JOHN

Well, then, I will tell you—  
 The plan is laid; and, if his bag of gold  
 Rejoice one serf to-day, then I'll resign  
 Maid Marian to his loving arms for ever.  
 But you must help me, mother, or she'll suspect.  
 Do not let slip your mask of friendliness,  
 As I have feared. Look—there our lovers come  
 Beneath that arch of roses. Look, look, mother,  
 They are taking leave of one another now,  
 A ghastly parting, for he will be gone  
 Well nigh four hours, they think. To look at them,  
 One might suppose they knew it was for ever.

## ELINOR

Come, or my hate **will** show itself in my face:  
I must not see them.

[*Exeunt PRINCE and ELINOR.* *A pause.* *Enter ROBIN HOOD and MARIAN.*]

## ROBIN

So, good-bye, once more,  
Sweetheart.

## MARIAN

Four hours; how shall I pass the time?  
Four hours, four ages, you will scarce be home  
By dusk; how shall I pass it?

## ROBIN

You've to think  
What robe to wear at the great masque to-night  
And then to don it. When you've done all that  
I shall be home again.

## MARIAN

What, not before?

## ROBIN

That's not unlikely, either.

## MARIAN

Now you mock me,  
But you'll be back before the masque begins.

## ROBIN

I warrant you I **will**.

## MARIAN

It is a month  
To-day since we were married. Did you know it?  
Fie, I believe you had forgotten, Robin.

## ROBIN

I had, almost. If marriage make the moons  
Fly, as this month has flown, we shall be old  
And grey in our graves before we know it.  
I wish that we could chain old Father Time.

## MARIAN

And break his glass into ten thousand pieces.

## ROBIN

And drown his cruel scythe ten fathom deep,  
Under the bright blue sea whence Love was born:

## MARIAN

Ah, but we have not parted all this month  
More than a garden's breadth, an arrow's flight:  
Time will be dead till you come back again.  
Four hours of absence make four centuries!  
Do you remember how the song goes, Robin,  
That bids true lovers not to grieve at parting  
Often? for Nature gently severs them thus,  
Training them up with kind and tender art,  
For the great day when they must part for ever.

## ROBIN

Do you believe it, Marian?

## MARIAN

No; for love

Buried beneath the dust of life and death,  
Would wait for centuries of centuries,  
Ages of ages, until God remembered,  
And, through that perishing cloud-wrack, face looked up  
Once more to loving face.

## ROBIN

Your hope—and mine!

Is not a man's poor memory, indeed,  
A daily resurrection? Your hope—and mine!

## MARIAN

And all the world's at heart! I do believe it.

## ROBIN

And I—if only that so many souls  
Like yours have died believing they should meet  
Again, lovers and children, little children!  
God will not break that trust. I have found my heaven  
Again in you; and, though I stumble still,  
Your small hand leads me thro' the darkness, up  
And onward, to the heights I dared not see,  
And dare not even now; but my head bows  
Above your face; I see them in your eyes.  
Love, point me onward still!

[*He takes her in his arms.*]

Good-bye! Good-bye!

## MARIAN

Come back, come back, before the masque begins!

## ROBIN

Ay, or a little later—never fear:  
You'll not so easily lose me.

## MARIAN

I shall count  
The minutes!

## ROBIN

Why, you're trembling!

## MARIAN

Yes, I am foolish.  
This is the first small parting we have had;  
But—you'll be back ere dusk?

## ROBIN

[*Laughing.*]

Ah, do you think  
That chains of steel could hold me, sweet, from you,  
With those two heavenly eyes to call me home,  
Those lips to welcome me? Good-bye!

## MARIAN

Good-bye!

[*He goes hurriedly out. She looks after him for a moment, then suddenly calls.*]

Robin! Ah, well, no matter now—too late!

[*She stands looking after him.*]

SCENE II. *Sherwood Forest: dusk. Outside the cave, as in the second act.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF runs quickly across the glade, followed by PUCK.

## PUCK

Shadow-of-a-Leaf! Shadow-of-a-Leaf! Shadow-of-a-Leaf!  
Don't dance away like that; don't hop; don't skip  
Like that, I tell you! I'll never do it again,  
I promise. Don't be silly now! Come here;  
I want to tell you something. Ah, that's right.  
Come, sit down here upon this bank of thyme  
"While I thine amiable ears"—Oh, no,  
Forgive me, ha! ha! ha!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Now, Master Puck,  
You'll kindly keep your word! A foxglove spray  
In the right hand is deadlier than the sword  
That mortals use, and one resounding thwack  
Applied to your slim fairyhood's green limbs  
Will make it painful, painful, very painful,  
Next time your worship wishes to sit down  
Cross-legged upon a mushroom.

## PUCK

Ha! ha! ha!

Poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

You keep your word, that's all!

## PUCK

Haven't I kept my word? Wasn't it I  
That made you what these poor, dull mortals call  
Crazy? Who crowned you with the cap and bells?  
Who made you such a hopeless, glorious fool  
That wise men are afraid of every word  
You utter? Wasn't it I that made you free  
Of fairyland—that showed you how to pluck  
Fern-seed by moonlight, and to walk and talk  
Between the lights, with urchins and with elves?  
Is there another fool twixt earth and heaven  
Like you—ungrateful rogue—answer me that!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

All true, dear gossip, and for saving me  
From the poor game of blind man's buff men call  
Wisdom, I thank you; but to hang and buzz  
Like a mad dragon-fly, now on my nose,  
Now on my neck, now singing in my ears,  
Is that to make me free of fairyland?  
No—that's enough to make the poor fool mad  
And take to human wisdom.

## PUCK

Yet you love me,  
Ha! ha!—you love me more than all the rest.  
You can't deny it! You can't deny it! Ha! ha!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I won't deny it, gossip. E'en as I think  
There must be something loves us creatures, Puck,  
More than the Churchmen say. We are so teased  
With thorns, bullied with briars, baffled with stars.

I've lain sometimes and laughed until I cried  
 To see the round moon rising o'er these trees  
 With that same foolish face of heavenly mirth  
 Winking at lovers in the blue-bell glade.

## PUCK

Lovers! Ha! ha! I caught a pair of 'em  
 Last night, behind the ruined chapel! Lovers!  
 O Lord, these mortals, they'll be the death of me!  
 Hist, who comes here?

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Scarlet and Little John,

And all the merry men—not half so merry  
 Since Robin went away. He was to come  
 And judge between the rich and poor to-day,  
 I think he has forgotten.

## PUCK

Hist, let me hide  
 Behind this hawthorn bush till they are gone.

[Enter the FORESTERS—they all go into the cave except SCARLET  
 and LITTLE JOHN, who stand at the entrance, looking  
 anxiously back.]

## LITTLE JOHN

I have never known the time when Robin Hood  
 Said "I will surely come," and hath not been  
 Punctual as yonder evening star.

## SCARLET

Pray God

No harm hath fallen him. Indeed he said,  
 "Count on my coming."

## LITTLE JOHN

I'll sound yet one more call.

They say these Courts will spoil a forester.  
It may be he has missed the way. I'd give  
My sword-hand just to hear his jolly bugle  
Answer me.

[*He blows a forest call. They listen. All is silent.*]

## SCARLET

Silence—only the sough of leaves!

## LITTLE JOHN

Well, I'm for sleep: the moon is not so bright  
Since Robin left us.

## SCARLET

Ha! Shadow-of-a-Leaf, alone?  
I thought I heard thy voice.

## LITTLE JOHN

Oh, he will talk  
With ferns and flowers and whisper to the mice!  
Perfectly happy, art thou not, dear fool?

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Perfectly happy since I lost my wits!

## SCARLET

Pray that thou never dost regain them, then,  
Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I thank you kindly, sir,  
And pray that you may quickly lose your own,  
And so be happy, too. Robin's away,  
But, if you'd lost your wits, you would not grieve.

## SCARLET

Good-night, good fool.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I will not say "Good-night,"

Wise man, for I am crazed, and so I know  
 'Tis good, and yet you'll grieve. I wish you both  
 A bad night that will tease your wits away  
 And make you happy.

*The OUTLAWS enter the cave. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF beckons to PUCK, who steals out again.]*

## PUCK

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, some change

Is creeping o'er the forest. I myself  
 Scarce laugh so much since Robin went away!  
 Oh, my head hangs as heavily as a violet  
 Brimmed with the rain. Shadow-of-a-Leaf, a cloud,  
 A whisper steals across this listening wood!  
 I am growing afraid. Dear fool, I am thy Puck,  
 But I am growing afraid there comes an end  
 To all our Sherwood revels, and I shall never  
 Tease thee again.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Here comes the King!

[Enter OBERON.]

Hail, Oberon.

King of the fairies, I strew ferns before you.  
 There are no palms here: ferns do just as well!

## OBERON

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, our battles all are wasted;  
 Our fairy dreams whereby we strove to warn  
 Robin and Marian, wasted. Shadow-of-a-Leaf,  
 Dear Robin Hood, the lover of the poor,  
 And kind Maid Marian, our forest queen,  
 Are in the toils at last!

[He pauses.]

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Speak, speak!

## OBERON

Prince John

Hath trapped and taken Robin.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Is not Richard  
King of this England? Did not Richard tempt  
Robin, for Marian's sake, to leave the forest?  
Did he not swear upon the Holy Cross  
That Robin should be Earl of Huntingdon  
And hold his lands in safety?

## OBERON

Only fear  
Of Richard held the wicked Prince in leash.  
But Richard roamed abroad again. Prince John  
Would murder Robin secretly.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Wise men  
Fight too much for these holy sepulchres!  
Are not the living images of God  
Better than empty graves?

## OBERON

One grave is filled  
Now; for our fairy couriers have brought  
Tidings that Richard Lion-Heart is dead.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Dead?

## OBERON

Dead! In a few brief hours the news will reach  
The wicked Prince. He will be King of England,  
With Marian in his power!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

No way to save them!

## OBERON

We cannot break our fairy vows of silence.  
 A mortal, Shadow-of-a-Leaf, can break those vows,  
 But only on pain of death.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oberon, I,  
 Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the fool, must break my vows!  
 I must save Robin Hood that he may save  
 Marian from worse than death.

## OBERON

Shadow-of-a-Leaf,  
 Think what death means to you, never to join  
 Our happy sports again, never to see  
 The moonlight streaming through these ancient oaks  
 Again, never to pass the fairy gates  
 Again. We cannot help it. They will close  
 Like iron in your face, and you will hear  
 Our happy songs within; but you will lie  
 Alone, without, dying, and never a word  
 To comfort you, no hand to touch your brow.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

So be it. I shall see them entering in!  
 The time is brief. Quick, tell me, where is Robin?  
 Quick, or the news that makes Prince John a king  
 Will ruin all.

## OBERON

Robin is even now  
 Thrust in the great dark tower beyond the wood,  
 The topmost cell where foot can never climb.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Cannot an arrow reach it? Ay, be swift;  
 Come, lead me thither.

## OBERON

I cannot disobey

The word that kills the seed to raise the wheat,  
The word that—Shadow-of-a-Leaf, I think I know  
Now, why great kings ride out to the Crusade.

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Quickly, come, quickly!

[*Exeunt OBERON and SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF. PUCK remains staring after them, then vanishes with a sob, between the trees. LITTLE JOHN and SCARLET appear once more at the mouth of the cave.*]

## SCARLET

I thought I heard a voice.

## LITTLE JOHN

'Twas only Shadow-of-a-Leaf again. He talks  
For hours among the ferns, plays with the flowers,  
And whispers to the mice, perfectly happy!

## SCARLET

I cannot rest for thinking that some harm  
Hath chanced to Robin. Call him yet once more.

[*LITTLE JOHN blows his bugle. All is silent. They stand listening.*]

SCENE III. *A gloomy cell. ROBIN bound. PRINCE JOHN and two mercenaries. A low narrow door in the background, small barred window on the left.*

## PRINCE JOHN

[*To the Mercenaries.*]

Leave us a moment. I have private matters  
To lay before this friend of all the poor.  
You may begin to build the door up now,  
So that you do not wall me in with him.

[*The two men begin filling up the doorway with rude blocks of masonry.*]

Se now, my good green foot-pad, you are trapped  
At last, trapped in the practice of your trade!  
Trapped, as you took your stolen Norman gold  
To what was it—a widow, or Saxon serf  
With eye put out for breaking forest laws?  
You hold with them, it seems. Your dainty soul  
Sickens at our gross penalties; and so  
We'll not inflict them on your noble self,  
Although we have the power. There's not a soul  
Can ever tell where Robin Hood is gone.  
These walls will never echo it.

[*He taps the wall with his sword.*]

And yet

There surely must be finer ways to torture  
So fine a soul as yours. Was it not you  
**Who** gave me like a fairing to my brother  
With lofty condescension in your eyes;  
And shall I call my mercenaries in  
And bid them burn your eyes out with hot irons?  
Richard is gone—he'll never hear of it!  
An Earl that plays the robber disappears,  
That's all. Most like he died in some low scuffle  
Out in the greenwood. I am half inclined  
To call for red-hot irons after all,  
So that your sympathy with Saxon churls  
May be more deep, you understand; and then  
It would be sweet for you, alone and blind,  
To know that you could never in this life  
See Marian's face again. But no—that's bad,  
Bad art to put hope's eyes out. It destroys  
Half a man's fear to rob him of his hope.  
No; you shall drink the dregs of it. Hope shall die  
More exquisite a death. Robin, my friend,  
You understand that, when I quit your presence,  
This bare blank cell becomes your living tomb.  
Do you not comprehend? It's none so hard.  
The doorway will be built up. There will be  
**No** door, you understand, but just a wall,  
Some six feet thick, of solid masonry.  
Nobody will disturb you, even to bring  
Water or food. You'll starve—see—like a rat,

Bricked up and buried. But you'll have time to think  
Of how I tread a measure at the masque  
To-night, with Marian, while her wide eyes wonder  
Where Robin is—and old Fitzwalter smiles  
And bids his girl be gracious to the Prince  
For his land's sake. Ah, ha! you wince at that!  
Will you not speak a word before I go?  
Speak, damn you!

[He strikes ROBIN across the face with his glove. ROBIN remains silent.]

Six days hence, if you keep watch  
At yonder window (you'll be hungry then)  
You may catch sight of Marian and Prince John  
Wandering into the gardens down below.  
You will be hungry then; perhaps you'll strive  
To call to us, or stretch a meagre arm  
Through those strong bars; but then you know the height  
Is very great—no voice can reach to the earth:  
This is the topmost cell in my Dark Tower.  
Men look like ants below there. I shall say  
To Marian, See that creature waving there  
High up above us, level with the clouds,  
Is it not like a winter-shrivelled fly?  
And she will laugh; and I will pluck her roses.  
And then—and then—there are a hundred ways,  
You know, to touch a woman's blood with thoughts  
Beyond its lawful limits. Ha! ha! ha!  
By God, you almost spoke to me, I think.  
Touches at twilight, whispers in the dark,  
Sweet sympathetic murmurs o'er the loss  
Of her so thoughtless Robin, do you think  
Maid Marian will be quite so hard to win  
When princes come to woo? There will be none  
To interrupt us then. Time will be mine  
To practise all the amorous arts of Ovid,  
And, at the last—

### ROBIN

Will you not free my hands?  
You have your sword. But I would like to fight you  
Here, with my naked hands. I want no more.

## PRINCE JOHN

Ha! ha! At last the sullen speaks.

That's all  
I wanted. I have struck you in the face.  
Is't not enough? You can't repay that blow.

## ROBIN

Bury me down in hell and I'll repay it  
The day you die, across your lying mouth  
That spoke of my true lady, I will repay it.  
Before the face of God!

## PRINCE JOHN

[*Laughing.*]

Meanwhile, for me  
Till you repay that blow, there is the mouth  
Of Marian, the sweet honey-making mouth  
That shall forestall your phantom blow with balm.  
Oh, you'll go mad too soon if I delay.  
I am glad you spoke. Farewell, the masons wait.  
And I must not be late for Marian.

[*Exit thro' the small aperture now left in the doorway. It is rapidly closed and sounds of heavy masonry being piled against it are heard. ROBIN tries to free his hands and after an effort, succeeds. He hurls himself against the doorway, and finds it hopeless. He turns to the window, peers through it for a moment, then suddenly unwinds a scarf from his neck, ties it to one of the bars and stands to one side.*]

## ROBIN

Too high a shot for most of my good bowmen!  
What's that? A miss?

[*He looks thro' the window.*]

Good lad, he'll try again!

[*He stands at the side once more and an arrow comes thro' the window.*]

Why, that's like magic!

[*He pulls up the thread attached to it.*]

Softly, or 'twill break!—

Ah, now 'tis sturdy cord.

—I'll make it fast.

But, how to break these bars!

St. Nicholas,

There's someone climbing. He must have a head  
Of iron, and the lightness of a cat!

Downward is bad enough, but up is more

Than mortal! Who the devil can it be?

Thank God, it's growing dark. But what a risk!

None of my merry men could e'en attempt it.

I'm very sure it can't be Little John.

What, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF appears at the window.]

'Fore God, dear faithful fool,

I am glad to see you.

#### SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Softly, gossip, softly,

Pull up the rope a little until we break

This bar away—or some kind friend may see

The dangling end below. Now here's a toothpick,

Six inches of grey steel, for you to work with,

And here's another for me. Pick out the mortar!

[They work to loosen the bars.]

Wait! Here's a rose I brought you in my cap

And here's a spray of fern! Old Nature's keys

Open all prisons, I'll throw them in for luck,

[He throws them into the cell and begins working feverishly again.]

So that the princes of the world may know

The forest let you out. Down there on earth,

If any sees me, they will only think

The creepers are in leaf. Pick out the mortar!

That's how the greenwood works. You know, 'twill thrust

Its tendrils through these big grey stones one day

And pull them down. I noticed in the courtyard

The grass is creeping though the crevices

Already, and yellow dandelions crouch

In all the crumbling corners. Pick it out!

This is a very righteous work indeed

For men in Lincoln green; for what are we  
 But tendrils of old Nature, herald sprays!  
 We scarce anticipate. Pick the mortar out.  
 Quick, there's no time to lose, although to-night  
 We're in advance of sun and moon and stars  
 And all the trickling sands in Time's turned glass.

[*With a sudden cry.*]

Richard is dead!

### ROBIN

Richard is dead! The King  
 Is dead!

### SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, dead! Come, pick the mortar out,  
 Out of the walls of towers and shrines and tombs!  
 For now Prince John is King, and Lady Marian  
 In peril, gossip! Yet we are in advance  
 Of sun and moon to-night, for sweet Prince John  
 Is not aware yet of his kinglihood,  
 Or of his brother's death.

### ROBIN

[*Pausing a moment.*]

Why, Shadow-of-a-Leaf,  
 What does this mean?

### SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Come, pick the mortar out;  
 You have no time to lose. This very night  
 My Lady Marian must away to Sherwood.  
 At any moment the dread word may come  
 That makes John King of England. Quick, be quick!

### ROBIN

She is at the masque to-night!

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Then you must mask  
And fetch her thence! Ah, ha, the bar works loose.  
Pull it!

{They pull at the bar, get it free, and throw it into the cell.]

Now, master, follow me down the rope.

[Exit ROBIN thro' the window.]

SCENE IV. *Night. The garden of the King's palace (as before), but lighted with torches for the masque. Music swells up and dies away continually. Maskers pass to and fro between the palace and the garden. On the broad terrace in front some of them are dancing a galliard.*

[PRINCE JOHN enters and is met by QUEEN ELINOR, neither of them masked.]

## ELINOR

All safe?

## PRINCE JOHN

Ay, buried and bricked up now, to think  
Alone, in the black night, of all I told him.  
Thank God, we have heard the last of Robin Hood.

## ELINOR

[She puts on her mask.]

You are sure?

## PRINCE JOHN

I saw him entombed with my own eyes!  
Six feet of solid masonry. Look there,  
There's the young knight you've lately made your own.  
Where is my Lady Marian? Ah, I see her!  
With that old hypocrite, Fitzwalter.

[They part. PRINCE JOHN puts on his mask as he goes.]

## A LADY

But tell me

Where is Prince John?

## A MASKER

That burly-shouldered man  
By yonder pillar, talking with old Fitzwalter,  
And the masked girl, in green, with red-gold hair,  
Is Lady Marian!

## THE LADY

Where is Robin Hood?

I have never seen him, but from all one hears  
He is a wood-god and a young Apollo,  
And a more chaste Actæon all in one.

## MASKER

Oh, ay, he never watched Diana bathing,  
Or, if he did, all Sherwood winked at it.  
Who knows? Do you believe a man and maid  
Can sleep out in the woods all night, as these  
Have slept a hundred times, and put to shame  
Our first poor parents; throw the apple aside  
And float out of their leafy Paradise  
Like angels?

## LADY

No; I fear the forest boughs  
Could tell sad tales. Oh, I imagine it—  
Married to Robin, by a fat hedge-priest  
Under an altar of hawthorn, with a choir  
Of sparrows, and a spray of cuckoo-spit  
For holy water! Oh, the modest chime  
Of blue-bells from a fairy belfry, a veil  
Of evening mist, a robe of golden hair;  
A blade of grass for a ring; a band of thieves  
In Lincoln green to witness the sweet bans;  
A glow-worm for a nuptial taper, a bed  
Of rose-leaves, and wild thyme and wood-doves' down.

Quick! Draw the bridal curtains—three tall ferns—  
Across the cave mouth, lest a star should peep  
And make the wild rose leap into her face!  
Pish! A sweet maid! But where is Robin Hood?

### MASKER

I know not; but he'd better have a care  
Of Mistress Marian. If I know Prince John  
He has marked her for his own.

### LADY

I cannot see  
What fascinates him.

### MASKER

No, you are right, nor I.

### PRINCE JOHN

Come, Lady Marian, let me lead you out  
To tread a measure.

### MARIAN

Pray, sir, pardon me!  
I am tired.

### FITZWALTER

[Whispering angrily to her.]

Now, Marian, be not so ungracious.  
You both abuse him and disparage us.  
His courtiers led the ladies they did choose.  
Do not displease him, girl. I pray you, go!  
Dance out your galliard. God's dear holy-bread,  
Y'are too forgetful. Dance, or by my troth,  
You'll move my patience. I say you do us wrong.

### MARIAN

I will do what you will. Lead, lead your dance.  
[*Exeunt JOHN and MARIAN.*]

## FIRST MASKER

[*To a lady, as they come up from the garden.*] Will you not let me see your face now, sweet?

## LADY

You hurt my lip with that last kiss of yours.  
Hush, do not lean your face so close, I pray you;  
Loosen my fingers. There's my lord.

## FIRST MASKER

Where? Where?  
Now, if I know him, I shall know your name!

## LADY

That tall man with the damozel in red.

## FIRST MASKER

Oh, never fear him. He, too, wore a mask!  
I saw them—

[*They pass out talking.*]

## SECOND MASKER

[*Looking after them.*]  
Saw you those two turtle-doves!

## SECOND LADY

Yes.

## SECOND MASKER

Come with me, I'll show you where I caught them  
Among the roses, half an hour ago.

[*They laugh and exeunt into the gardens. The music swells up and more dancers appear.*]

[*Enter ROBIN HOOD, still in his forester's garb, but wearing a mask. He walks as if wounded and in pain. He sits down in the shadow of a pillar watching, and partly concealed from the throng.*]

## THIRD LADY

Remember now to say you did not see me  
Here at the masque.

## THIRD MASKER

Or shall I say that I

Was out in Palestine?

[*They pass. Enter little ARTHUR PLANTAGENET. He comes up to ROBIN HOOD.*]

## ARTHUR

Are you not Robin Hood?

## ROBIN

Hush, Arthur. Don't you see I wear a mask  
Like all the rest to-night?

## ARTHUR

Why do they wear

Masks?

## ROBIN

They must always wear some sort of mask  
At court. Sometimes they wear them all their lives.

## ARTHUR

You are jesting, Robin. Now I wanted you  
To tell me tales of Sherwood. Tell me how  
You saved Will Scarlet.

## ROBIN

Why, I've told you that

A score of times.

## ARTHUR

I know, I want to hear it  
Again. Well, tell me of that afternoon  
When Lion-Heart came home from the Crusade.  
I have often thought of that. It must have been  
Splendid! You weren't expecting it at all?

ROBIN

No, not at all; but, Arthur, tell me first  
Have you seen Lady Marian?

ARTHUR

Yes, I saw her  
Treading a measure with my Uncle John!

ROBIN

Stand where you are and watch; and, if you see her,  
Beckon her. Then I'll tell you how the King  
Came home from the Crusade.

ARTHUR

First, let me tell you  
Just how I think it was. It must have been  
Like a great picture. All your outlaws there  
Sitting around your throne of turf, and you  
Judging the rich and poor. That's how it was  
Last night, I dreamed of it; and you were taking  
The baron's gold and giving it to the halt  
And blind; and then there was a great big light  
Between the trees, as if a star had come  
Down to the earth and caught among the boughs,  
With beams like big soft swords amongst the ferns  
And leaves, and through the light a mighty steed  
Stepped, and the King came home from the Crusade.  
Was it like that? Was there a shining light?

ROBIN

I think there must have been, a blinding light.

ARTHUR

Filling an arch of leaves?

ROBIN

Yes!

ARTHUR

That was it!

That's how the King came home from the Crusade.

ROBIN

But there—you've told the story!

ARTHUR

Ah, not all!

ROBIN

No, not quite all. What's that?

[*The music suddenly stops. The maskers crowd together whispering excitedly.*]

ARTHUR

Why have they stopped

The music? Ah, there's Hubert. Shall I ask him?

ROBIN

Yes, quickly, and come back!

[*ARTHUR runs up to a masker. Several go by hurriedly.*]

FIRST MASKER

The King is dead!

SECOND MASKER

Where did it happen? France?

FIRST MASKER

I know not, sir!

[*ARTHUR returns.*]

ARTHUR

Robin, they say the King is dead! So John  
Is king now, is he not?

ROBIN

Ay, John is king!  
Now, tell me quickly, use your eyes, my boy,  
Where's Lady Marian?

ARTHUR

Ah, there she is at last,  
Alone!

ROBIN

Go to her quickly, and bring her hither.

[ARTHUR runs off and returns with MARIAN.]

MARIAN

Robin, thank God, you have returned. I feared—

ROBIN

No more, dear heart, you must away to Sherwood!  
Shadow-of-a-Leaf is waiting by the orchard  
With your white palfrey. Away, or the new king  
Will hunt us down. I'll try to gain you time.  
Go—quickly!

MARIAN

Robin, your face is white, you are wounded!  
What's this—there's blood upon your doublet!  
Robin!

ROBIN

Nothing! Go, quickly!

MARIAN

Robin, I cannot leave you.

ROBIN

Go, Marian. If you ever loved me, go.

MARIAN

You'll follow?

ROBIN

Oh, with my last breath I will,  
God helping me; but I must gain you time!  
Quickly! Here comes the King!

MARIAN

Oh, follow soon!

[Exit.]

[ROBIN sits down again, steadyng himself against the pillar.  
JOHN appears at the doors of the palace, above the terrace, a  
scroll in his hand.]

JOHN

My friends, the King is dead!

MASKERS

[Taking off their masks, with a cry.]

Long live King John!

JOHN

[Coming down amongst them.]

Our masque is ended by this grievous news;  
But where's my Lady Marian? I had some word  
To speak with her! Not here! Why—

ROBIN

[Still masked, rises and confronts the King, who stares at him and  
shrinks back a little.]

All the masks

Are off, sire! No, perhaps they wear them still.

JOHN

Who is this?

ROBIN

One that was dead and lives. You say  
Your brother, the great King, is dead. Oh, sire,  
If that be so, you'll hear a dead man speak,

For your dead brother's sake. You say the King  
 Is dead; but you are king. So the King lives!  
 You are King of England now from sea to sea,  
 Is it not so? Shout, maskers, once again,  
 Long live the King!

## MASKERS

Long live the King!

## ROBIN

You see

What power is yours! Your smile is life, your frown  
 Death. At a word from you the solid earth  
 Would shake with tramp of armies. You can call  
 Thousands to throw away their lives like straws  
 Upon your side, if any foreign king  
 Dare to affront you.

[*He draws nearer to John, who still shrinks a little, as if in fear.*] Richard, you say, is dead.

And yet, O King, I say that the great King  
 Lives!

[*He strikes JOHN across the face. JOHN cowers and staggers back. The MASKERS draw their swords, the women scream and rush together. ROBIN turns, sword in hand, to confront the MASKERS.*]

Back, fools; for I say that the great King  
 Lives. Do not doubt it. Ye have dreamed him dead  
 How often. Hark, God in heaven, ye know that voice.

[*A voice is heard drawing nearer thro' the distant darkness of the garden, singing. All listen. JOHN's face whitens.*]

[*Song.*]

Knight, on the narrow way,  
 Where wouldest thou ride?  
 "Onward," I heard him say,  
 "Love, to thy side."

## ROBIN

'Tis Blondel! Still vaunt-courier to the King,  
 As when he burst the bonds of Austria! Listen!

[*Song nearer.*]

“Nay,” sang a bird above,  
“Stay, for I see  
Death, in the mask of love,  
Waiting for thee.”

### MASKERS

[*Resuming their masks and muttering to one another.*]  
Can the King live? Is this John’s treachery? Look,  
He is crushed with fear!

### ROBIN

Listen! I’ll go to meet him.  
[*Exit into the garden.*]

### MASKERS

It was the song of Blondel! The same song  
He made with Richard, long since!—

Blondel’s voice!  
Just as we heard it on that summer’s night  
When Lion-Heart came home from the Crusade.

[*The Song still drawing nearer.*]

“Death! What is Death?” he cried.  
“I must ride on,  
On to my true love’s side,  
Up to her throne!”

[*Enter BLONDEL, from the garden. He stands, startled by the scene before him.*]

### MASKERS

Blondel! Where is the King? Where is the King?

### BLONDEL

Did ye not know?—Richard, the King, is dead!

### MASKERS

Dead!

## JOHN

Dead! And ye let the living dog escape  
 That dared snarl at our sovereignty. I know him,  
 Risen from the dead or not. I know 'twas he,  
 'Twas Robin Hood! After him; hunt him down!  
 Let him not live to greet another sun.  
 After him!

## MASKERS

*[Drawing their swords and plunging into the darkness.]*  
 After him; hunt the villain down!

*[Curtain.]*

## ACT V

SCENE I. *Morning. Sherwood Forest (as before).*

LITTLE JOHN and some of the OUTLAWS are gathered together talking. Occasionally they look anxiously toward the cave and at the approaches through the wood.  
*Enter two FORESTERS, running and breathless.*

## FIRST FORESTER

The King's men! They are scouring thro' the wood,  
 Two troops of them, five hundred men in each  
 And more are following.

## SECOND FORESTER

We must away from here  
 And quickly.

## LITTLE JOHN

Where did you sight them?

## SECOND FORESTER

From the old elm,  
 Our watch-tower. They were not five miles away!

## FIRST FORESTER

Five, about five. We saw the sunlight flash  
Along, at least five hundred men at arms;  
And, to the north, along another line,  
Bigger, I think; but not so near.

## SECOND FORESTER

Where's Robin?

We must away at once!

## FIRST FORESTER

No time to lose!

## LITTLE JOHN

His wound is bitter—I know not if we dare  
Move him!

## FIRST FORESTER

His wound?

## LITTLE JOHN

Ay, some damned arrow pierced him  
When he escaped last night from the Dark Tower.  
He never spoke of it when first he reached us;  
And, suddenly, he swooned. He is asleep  
Now. He must not be wakened. They will take  
Some time yet ere they thread our forest-maze.

## FIRST FORESTER

Not long, by God, not long. They are moving fast.

[MARIAN appears at the mouth of the cave. All turn to look at  
her, expectantly. She seems in distress.]

## MARIAN

He is tossing to and fro. I think his wound  
Has taken fever! What can we do?

## FRIAR TUCK

I've sent

A messenger to Kirklee Priory,  
 Where my old friend the Prioress hath store  
 Of balms and simples, and hath often helped  
 A wounded forester. Could we take him there,  
 Her skill would quickly heal him.

## LITTLE JOHN

The time is pressing!

## FRIAR TUCK

The lad will not be long!

[ROBIN appears tottering and white at the mouth of the cave.]

## MARIAN

[Running to him.]

O Robin, Robin,

You must not rise! Your wound!

## ROBIN

[He speaks feverishly.]

Where can I rest

Better than on my greenwood throne of turf?  
 Friar, I heard them say they had some prisoners.  
 Bring them before me.

## FRIAR TUCK

Master, you are fevered,

And they can wait.

## ROBIN

Yes, yes; but there are some  
 That cannot wait, that die for want of food,  
 And then—the Norman gold will come too late,  
 Too late.

## LITTLE JOHN

O master, you must rest.

[Going up to him.]

## MARIAN

Oh, help me,

Help me with him. Help me to lead him back.

## ROBIN

No! No! You must not touch me! I will rest  
When I have seen the prisoners, not before.

## LITTLE JOHN

He means it, mistress, better humour him  
Or he will break his wound afresh.

## MARIAN

O Robin,  
Give me your word that you'll go back and rest,  
When you have seen them.

## ROBIN

Yes, I will try, I will try!  
But oh, the sunlight! Where better, sweet, than this?  
[She leads him to the throne of turf and he sits down upon it, with  
MARIAN at his side.]

The Friar is right. This life is wine, red wine,  
Under the greenwood boughs! Oh, still to keep it,  
One little glen of justice in the midst  
Of multitudinous wrong. Who knows? We yet  
May leaven the whole world.

[Enter the OUTLAWS, with several prisoners, among them, a  
KNIGHT, an ABBOT, and a FORESTER.]

These are the prisoners?  
You had some victims of the forest laws  
That came to you for help. Bring them in, too,  
And set them over against these lords of the earth!  
[Some ragged women and children appear. Several serfs with  
iron collars round their necks and their eyes put out,  
are led gently in.]

Is that our Lincoln green among the prisoners?  
There? One of my own band?

## LITTLE JOHN

Ay, more's the pity!  
 We took him out of pity, and he has wronged  
 Our honour, sir; he has wronged a helpless woman  
 Entrusted to his guidance thro' the forest.

## ROBIN

Ever the same, the danger comes from those  
 We fight for, those below, not those above!  
 Which of you will betray me to the King?

## THE FORESTER

Do you ask *me*, sir?

## ROBIN

Judas answered first,  
 With "Master, is it I?" Hang not thy head!  
 What say'st thou to this charge?

## THE FORESTER

Why, Friar Tuck  
 Can answer for me. Do you think he cares  
 Less for a woman's lips than I?

## FRIAR TUCK

Cares less,  
 Thou rotten radish? Nay, but a vast deal more!  
 God's three best gifts to man,—woman and song  
 And wine, what dost *thou* know of all their joy?  
 Thou lean pick-purse of kisses?

## ROBIN

Take him out,  
 Friar, and let him pack his goods and go,  
 Whither he will. I trust the knave to thee  
 And thy good quarter-staff, for some five minutes  
 Before he says "Farewell."

## FRIAR

Bring him along,  
Give him a quarter-staff, I'll thrash him roundly.  
[He goes out. Two of the FORESTERS follow with the prisoner.  
Others bring the ABBOT before ROBIN.]

## ROBIN

Ah! Ha! I know him, the godly usurer  
Of York!

## LITTLE JOHN

We saw a woman beg for alms,  
One of the sufferers by the rule which gave  
This portly Norman his fat priory  
And his abundant lands. We heard him say  
That he was helpless, had not one poor coin  
To give her, not a scrap of bread! He wears  
Purple beneath his cloak: his fine sleek palfrey  
Flaunted an Emperor's trappings!

## ABBOT

Man, the Church

Must keep her dignity!

## ROBIN

[Pointing to the poor woman, etc.]

Ay, look at it!

There is your dignity! And you must wear  
Silk next your skin to show it. But there was one  
You call your Master, and He had not where  
To lay His head, save one of these same trees!

## ABBOT

Do you blaspheme! I pray you, let me go!  
There are grave matters waiting. I am poor!

## ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

ABBOT

[*Hurriedly.*]

I have five marks  
In all the world, no more. I'll give them to you!

ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

[*They pour a heap of gold out of his purse.*]

ROBIN

Five marks, indeed!

Here's, at the least, a hundred marks in gold!

ABBOT

That is my fees, my fees; you must not take them!

ROBIN

The ancient miracle!—five loaves, two small fishes;  
And then—of what remained—they gathered up  
Twelve basketsful!

ABBOT

Oh, you blaspheming villains!

ROBIN

Abbot, I chance to know how this was wrought,  
This miracle; wrought with the blood, anguish and sweat  
Of toiling peasants, while the cobwebs clustered  
Around your lordly cellars of red wine.  
Give him his five and let him go.

ABBOT

[*Going out.*]

The King  
Shall hear of this! The King will hunt you down!

ROBIN

And now —the next!

SCARLET

Beseech you, sir, to rest.

Your wound will—

ROBIN

No! The next, show me the next!

SCARLET

This Norman baron—

ROBIN

What, another friend!

Another master of broad territories.

How many homes were burned to make you lord  
Of half a shire? What hath he in his purse?

SCARLET

Gold and to spare!

BARON

To keep up mine estate

I need much more.

ROBIN

[*Pointing to the poor.*]

Ay, you need these! these! these!

BARON

[*Protesting.*]

I am not rich.

ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

BARON

You dogs, the King shall hear of it!

## ROBIN

*[Murmuring as if to himself.]*

Five loaves!

And yet, of what remained, they gathered up  
 Twelve basketsful. The bread of human kindness  
 Goes far! Oh, I begin to see new meanings  
 In that old miracle! How much? How much?

## SCARLET

Five hundred marks in gold!

## ROBIN

*[Half rising and speaking with a sudden passion.]*

His churls are starving,  
 Starving! Their little children cry for bread!  
 One of those jewels on his baldric there  
 Would feed them all in plenty all their lives!  
 Five loaves—and yet—and yet—of what remained,  
 The fragments, mark you, twelve great basketsful!

## BARON

I am in a madman's power! The man is mad!

## ROBIN

Take all he has, all you can get. To-night,  
 When all is dark (we must have darkness, mind,  
 For deeds like this) blind creatures will creep out  
 With groping hands and gaping mouths, lean arms,  
 And shrivelled bodies, branded, fettered, lame,  
 Distorted, horrible; and they will weep  
 Great tears like gouts of blood upon our feet,  
 And we shall succour them and make them think  
 (That's if you have not mangled their poor souls  
 As well, or burned their children with their homes),  
 We'll try to make them think that some few rods  
 Of earth are not so bitter as hell might be.  
 Are you not glad to think of this? Nay—go—  
 Or else your face will haunt me when I die!  
 Take him quickly away. The next! The next!  
 O God!

*[Flings up his arms and falls fainting.]*

## MARIAN

[Bending over him.]

O Robin! Robin! Help him quickly.

The wound! The wound!

[They gather round ROBIN. The OUTLAWS come back with the captive FORESTER, his pack upon his back.]

## FRIAR TUCK

[To the FORESTER.]

Now, get you gone and quickly!

What, what hath happened?

[Friar Tuck and the OUTLAWS join the throng round ROBIN.  
The FORESTER shakes his fist at them and goes across the glade muttering. The MESSENGER from Kirklee Priory comes out of the forest at the same moment and speaks to him, not knowing of his dismissal.]

## MESSENGER

All's well! Robin can come  
To Kirklee. Our old friend the Prioress  
Is there, and faithful! They've all balms and simples  
To heal a wound.

## FORESTER

[Staring at him.]

To Kirklee?

## MESSENGER

Yes, at sunset,  
We'll take him to the borders of the wood  
All will be safe.  
Where he can steal in easily, alone.

## FORESTER

The King's men are at hand!

## MESSENGER

Oh, but if we can leave him there, all's safe;  
We'll dodge the King's men.

FORESTER

When is he to go?

MESSENGER

Almost at once; but he must not steal in  
 Till sundown, when the nuns are all in chapel.  
 How now? What's this? What's this?

*'He goes across to the throng round ROBIN.'*

FORESTER

[*Looking after him.*]

Alone, to Kirklee!

[*Exit.*]

**SCENE II.** *A room in Kirklee Priory. A window on the right overlooks a cloister leading up to the chapel door. The forest is seen in the distance, the sun beginning to set behind it. The PRIORESS and a Novice are sitting in a window-seat engaged in broidery work.*

NOVICE

He must be a good man—this Robin Hood!  
 I long to see him. Father used to say  
 England had known none like him since the days  
 Of Hereward the Wake.

PRIORESS

He will be here  
 By vespers. You shall let him in. Who's that?  
 Can that be he? It is not sundown yet.  
 See who is there.

[*Exit Novice. She returns excitedly.*]

NOVICE

A lady asks to see you!  
 She is robed like any nun and yet she spoke  
 Like a great lady—one that is used to rule

More than obey; and on her breast I saw  
 A ruby smouldering like a secret fire  
 Beneath her cloak. She bade me say she came  
 On Robin Hood's behest.

## PRIORESS

What? Bring her in  
 Quickly.

[*Exit Novice and returns with Queen Elinor in a nun's garb.*  
*At the sign from the Prioreess the Novice retires.*]

## ELINOR

Madam, I come to beg a favour.  
 I am a friend of Robin Hood. I have heard—  
 One of his Foresters, this very noon  
 Brought me the news—that he is sorely wounded;  
 And purposes to seek your kindly help  
 At Kirklee Priory.

## PRIORESS

Oh, then indeed,  
 You must be a great friend, for this was kept  
 Most secret from all others.

## ELINOR

A great friend!  
 He was my page some fifteen years ago,  
 And all his life I have watched over him  
 As if he were my son! I have come to beg  
 A favour—let me see him when he comes.  
 My husband was a soldier, and I am skilled  
 In wounds. In Palestine I saved his life  
 When every leech despaired of it, a wound  
 Caused by a poisoned arrow.

## PRIORESS

You shall see him.  
 I have some skill myself in balms and simples,  
 But, in these deadlier matters I would fain  
 Trust to your wider knowledge.

## ELINOR

Let me see him alone;  
 Alone, you understand. His mind is fevered.  
 I have an influence over him. Do not say  
 That I am here, or aught that will excite him.  
 Better say nothing—lead him gently in,  
 And leave him. In my hands he is like a child.

## PRIORESS

It shall be done. I see you are subtly versed  
 In the poor workings of our mortal minds.

## ELINOR

I learnt much from a wise old Eastern leech  
 When I was out in Palestine.

## PRIORESS

I have heard  
 They have great powers and magic remedies;  
 They can restore youth to the withered frame.

## ELINOR

There is only one thing that they cannot do.

## PRIORESS

And what?

## ELINOR

They cannot raise the dead.

## PRIORESS

Ah, no;  
 I am most glad to hear you say it, most glad  
 To know we think alike. That is most true—  
 Yes—yes—most true; for God alone, dear friend,  
 Can raise the dead!

*[A bell begins tolling slowly.]*

The bell for even-song!

You have not long to wait.

[Shadowy figures of nuns pass the windows and enter the chapel.  
The sunset deepens.]

Will you not pray

With me?

[The PRIORESS and QUEEN ELINOR kneel down together before a  
little shrine. Enter the Novice.]

NOVICE

There is a forester at the door.

Mother, I think 'tis he!

PRIORESS

[Rising.]

Admit him, then.

ELINOR

Leave me: I will keep praying till he comes.

PRIORESS

You are trembling! You are not afraid?

ELINOR

[With eyes closed as in strenuous devotion.]

No; no;

Leave me, I am but praying!

[A chant swells up in the chapel. Exit PRIORESS. ELINOR continues muttering as in prayer. Enter ROBIN HOOD, steadyng himself on his bow, weak and white. She rises and passes between him and the door to confront him.]

ELINOR

Ah, Robin, you have come to me at last  
For healing. Pretty Marian cannot help you  
With all her kisses.

## ROBIN HOOD

[*Staring at her wildly.*]

You! I did not know  
That you were here. I did not ask your help.  
I must go—Marian!

[*He tries to reach the door, but reels in a half faint on the way.*

*ELINOR supports him as he pauses, panting for breath.*]

## ELINOR

Robin, your heart is hard,  
Both to yourself and me. You cannot go,  
Rejecting the small help which I can give  
As if I were a leper. Ah, come back.  
Are you so unforgiving? God forgives!  
Did you not see me praying for your sake?  
Think, if you think not of yourself, oh, think  
Of Marian—can you leave her clinging arms  
Yet, for the cold grave, Robin? I have risked  
Much, life itself, to bring you help this day!  
I have some skill in wounds.

[*She holds him closer and brings her face near to his own, looking into his eyes.*]

Ah, do you know  
How slowly, how insidiously this death  
Creeps, coil by tightening coil, around a man.  
When he is weak as you are? Do you know  
How the last subtle coil slips round your throat  
And the flat snake-like head lifts up and peers  
With cruel eyes of cold, keen inquisition,  
Rivetting your own, until the blunt mouth sucks  
Your breath out with one long, slow, poisonous kiss?

## ROBIN HOOD

O God, that nightmare! Leave me! Let me go!

## ELINOR

You stare at me as if you saw that snake.  
Ha! Ha! Your nerves are shaken; you are so weak!

You cannot go! What! Fainting? Ah, rest here  
Upon this couch.

[*She half supports, half thrusts him back to a couch, in an alcove out of sight and draws a curtain. There is a knock at the door.*]

ELINOR

Who's there?

PRIORESS

Madam, I came  
To know if I could help in anything.

ELINOR

Nothing! His blood runs languidly. It needs  
The pricking of a vein to make the heart  
Beat, and the sluggish rivers flow. I have brought  
A lance for it. I'll let a little blood.  
Not over-much; enough, enough to set  
The pulses throbbing.

PRIORESS

Maid Marian came with him.  
She waits without and asks—

ELINOR

Let her not come  
Near him till all is done. Let her not know  
Anything, or the old fever will awake.  
I'll lance his arm now!

[*The PRIORESS closes the door. ELINOR goes into the alcove.*

*The chant from the chapel swells up again. QUEEN ELINOR comes out of the alcove, white and trembling.  
She speaks in a low whisper as she looks back.]*

Now, trickle down, sweet blood. Grow white, fond lips  
That have kissed Marian—yet, she shall not boast  
You kissed her last; for I will have you wake  
To the fierce memory of this kiss in heaven  
Or burn with it in hell;

[She kneels down as if to kiss the face of ROBIN, within. The chant from the chapel swells up more loudly. The door slowly opens. MARIAN steals in. ELINOR rises and confronts her.]

ELINOR

[Laying a hand upon ROBIN's bow beside her.]  
Hush! Do not wake him!

MARIAN

[In a low voice.]  
What have you done with him?

ELINOR

[As MARIAN advances towards the couch.]  
Hush! Not a step further! Stay where you are! His life  
Hangs on a thread.

MARIAN

Why do you stare upon me?  
What have you done? What's this that trickles down—  
[Stoops to the floor and leaps back with a scream.]  
It is blood. You have killed him!

ELINOR

[Seizes the bow and shoots.]  
Follow him—down to hell.  
King John will find you there.  
[Exit. The scene grows dark.]

MARIAN

[Lifts her head with a groan.]  
I am dying, Robin!  
O God, I cannot wake him! Robin! Robin!  
Give me one word to take into the dark!  
He will not wake! He will not wake! O God,  
Help him!

[She falls back unconscious. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF, a green spray in his hand, opens the casement and stands for a moment in the window against the last glow of sunset, then enters and runs to the side of ROBIN.]

## SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Hurriedly.*]

Awake, awake, Robin, awake!  
 The forest waits to help you! All the leaves  
 Are listening for your bugle. Ah, where is it?  
 Let but one echo sound and the wild flowers  
 Will break thro' these grey walls and the green sprays  
 Drag down these deadly towers. Wake, Robin, wake,  
 And let the forest drown the priest's grey song  
 With happy murmurs. Robin, the gates are open  
 For you and Marian! All I had to give  
 I have given to thrust them open, the dear gates  
 Of fairyland which I shall never pass  
 Again. I can no more, I am but a shadow,  
 Dying as mortals die! It is not I  
 That calls, not I, but Marian. Hear her voice!  
 Robin, awake!  
 O, master mine, farewell!

[*Exit lingeringly through the casement.*]

## ROBIN

[ROBIN is dimly seen in the mouth of the alcove. He stretches out his hands blindly in the dark.]

Marian! Why do you call to me in dreams?  
 Why do you call me? I must go. What's this?  
 Help me, kind God, for I must say one word,  
 Only one word—good-bye—to Marian,  
 To Marian—Ah, too weak, too weak!

[He sees the dark body of MARIAN and utters a cry, falling on his knees beside her.]

O God,  
 Marian! Marian!

My bugle! Ah, my bugle!

[He rises to his feet and, drowning the distant organ-music, he blows a resounding forest-call. It is answered by several in the forest. He falls on his knees by MARIAN and takes her in his arms.]

O Marian, Marian, who hath used thee so?

### MARIAN

Robin, it is my death-wound. Ah, come close.

### ROBIN

Marian, Marian, what have they done to thee?

[The OUTLAWS are heard thundering at the gates with cries.]

### OUTLAWS

Robin! Robin! Robin! Break down the doors.

[The terrified nuns stream past the window, out of the chapel. The OUTLAWS rush into the room. The scene still darkens.]

### SCARLET

Robin and Marian!

### LITTLE JOHN

Christ, what devil's hand  
Hath played the butcher here? Quick, hunt them down,  
They passed out yonder. Let them not outlive  
Our murdered king and queen.

### REYNOLD GREENLEAF

O Robin, Robin,  
Who shot this bitter shaft into her breast?  
[Several stoop and kneel by the two lovers.]

### ROBIN HOOD

Speak to me, Marian, speak to me, only speak!  
Just one small word, one little loving word  
Like those—do you remember?—you have breathed  
So many a time and often, against my cheek,

Under the boughs of Sherwood, in the dark  
At night, with nothing but the boughs and stars  
Between us and the dear God up in heaven!  
O God, why does a man's heart take so long  
To break? It would break sooner if you spoke  
A word to me, a word, one small kind word.

## MARIAN

Sweetheart!

## ROBIN

Sweetheart! You have broken it, broken it! Oh, kind,  
Kind heart of Marian!

## MARIAN

Robin, come soon!  
[Dies.]

## ROBIN

Soon, sweetheart! Oh, her sweet brave soul is gone!  
Marian, I follow quickly!

## SCARLET

God, Kirklee

Shall burn for this!

## LITTLE JOHN

Kirklee shall burn for this!

O master, master, you shall be avenged!

## ROBIN

No; let me stand upright! Your hand, good Scarlet!  
We have lived our lives and God be thanked we go  
Together thro' this darkness. We shall wake,  
Please God, together. It is growing darker!  
I cannot see your faces. Give me my bow  
Quickly into my hands, for my strength fails  
And I must shoot one last shaft on the trail  
Of yonder setting sun, never to reach it!

But where this last, last bolt of all my strength,  
 My hope, my love, shall fall, there bury us both,  
 Together, and tread the green turf over us!  
 The bow!

[SCARLET hands him his bow. He stands against the faint glow  
 of the window, draws the bow to full length, shoots and  
 falls back into the arms of LITTLE JOHN.]

### LITTLE JOHN

[Laying him down.]

Weep, England, for thine outlawed lover,  
 Dear Robin Hood, the poor man's friend, is dead.

[The scene becomes quite dark. Then out of the darkness, and as if at a distance, the voice of SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF is heard singing the fairy song of the first scene. The fairy glade in Sherwood begins to be visible in the gloom by the soft light of the ivory gates which are swinging open once more among the ferns. As the scene grows clearer the song of SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF grows more and more triumphant and is gradually caught up by the chorus of the fairy host within the woods.]

[Song of SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.]

### I

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
 Forest has conquered!

The world begins again!  
 And O, the red of the roses,  
 And the rush of the healing rain!

### II

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
 Forest has conquered!

The Princess wakes from sleep;  
 For the soft green keys of the wood-land  
 Have opened her donjon-keep!

## III

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!

    Their grey walls hemmed us round;  
    But, under my greenwood oceans,  
        Their castles are trampled and drowned.

## IV

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!

    My green sprays climbed on high,  
    And the ivy laid hold on their turrets  
        And haled them down from the sky!

## V

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!

    They were strong! They are overthrown!  
    For the little soft hands of the wild-flowers  
        Have broken them, stone by stone.

## VI

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!

    Though Robin lie dead, lie dead,  
    And the green turf by Kirklee  
        Lie light over Marian's head,

## VII

Green ferns on the crimson sky-line,  
    What bugle have you heard?  
Was it only the peal of the blue-bells,  
    Was it only the call of a bird?

## VIII

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!

The rose o'er the fortalice floats!  
My nightingales chant in their chapels,  
My lilies have bridged their moats!

## IX

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!

King Death, in the light of the sun,  
Shrinks like an elfin shadow!  
His reign is over and done!

## X

The hawthorn whitens the wood-land;  
My lovers, awake, awake,  
Shake off the grass-green coverlet,  
Glide, bare-foot, thro' the brake!

## XI

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!

And, under the great green boughs,  
I have found out a place for my lovers,  
I have built them a beautiful house.

## XII

Green ferns in the dawn-red dew-fall,  
This gift by my death I give,—  
They shall wander immortal thro' Sherwood!  
In my great green house they shall live!

## XIII

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!

When the first wind blows from the South,  
They shall meet by the Gates of Faërie!  
She shall set her mouth to his mouth!

## XIV

He shall gather her, fold her and keep her;  
They shall pass thro' the Gates, they shall live!  
For the Forest, the Forest has conquered!  
This gift by my death I give!

## XV

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The  
Forest has conquered!  
The world awakes anew;  
And O, the scent of the hawthorn,  
And the drip of the healing dew!

[*The song ceases. TITANIA and OBERON come out into the moon-lit glade.*]

## OBERON

Yet one night more the gates of fairyland  
Are opened by a mortal's kindly deed.  
But Robin Hood and Marian now are driven  
As we shall soon be driven, from the world  
Of cruel mortals.

## TITANIA

Mortals call them dead;  
Oberon, what is death?

## OBERON

Only a sleep.  
But these may dream their happy dreams in death  
Before they wake to that new lovely life  
Beyond the shadows; for poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf  
Has given them this by love's eternal law  
Of sacrifice, and they shall enter in  
To dream their lover's dream in fairyland.

## TITANIA

And Shadow-of-a-Leaf?

## OBERON

He cannot enter now.  
The gates are closed against him.

## TITANIA

For ever?

But is this

## OBERON

We fairies have not known or heard  
 What waits for those who, like this wandering Fool,  
 Throw all away for love. But I have heard  
 There is a great King, out beyond the world,  
 Not Richard, who is dead, nor yet King John;  
 But a great King who one day will come home  
 Clothed with the clouds of heaven from His Crusade.

## TITANIA

The great King!

## OBERON

Hush, the poor dark mortals come!

[*The crowd of serfs, old men, poor women, and children, begin to enter as the fairy song swells up within the gates again.*

*ROBIN and MARIAN are led along by a crowd of fairies at the end of the procession.]*

## TITANIA

And there, see, there come Robin and his bride.  
 And the fairies lead them on, strewing their path  
 With ferns and moon-flowers. See, they have entered in!

[*The last fairy vanishes thro' the gates.*]

## OBERON

And we must follow, for the gates may close  
 For ever now. Hundreds of years may pass  
 Before another mortal gives his life  
 To help the poor and needy.

[*OBERON and TITANIA follow hand in hand thro' the gates. They begin to close. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF steals wistfully and hesitatingly across, as if to enter. They close in his face. He goes up to them and leans against them sobbing, a small green figure, looking like a greenwood spray against their soft ivory glow. The*

*fairy music dies. He sinks to his knees and holds up his hands. Immediately a voice is heard singing and drawing nearer thro' the forest.]*

[Song—drawing nearer.]

Knight on the narrow way,  
Where wouldest thou ride?  
“Onward,” I heard him say,  
“Love, to thy side!”

“Nay,” sang a bird above,  
“Stay, for I see  
Death in the mask of love  
Waiting for thee.”

[Enter BLONDEL, leading a great white steed. He stops and looks at the kneeling figure.]

BLONDEL

Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[Rising to his feet.]  
Blondel!

BLONDEL

I go to seek

My King!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[In passionate grief.]  
The King is dead!

BLONDEL

[In yet more passionate joy and triumph.]  
The great King lives!  
[Then more tenderly.]

Will you not come and look for Him with me?

[They go slowly together through the forest and are lost to sight.

BLONDEL's voice is heard singing the third stanza  
of the song in the distance, further and further away.]  
“Death? What is Death?” he cried.

“I must ride on!”

[Curtain.]

## TALES OF THE MERMAID TAVERN

## I

## A KNIGHT OF THE OCEAN-SEA

UNDER that foggy sunset London glowed,  
Like one huge cob-webbed flagon of old wine.  
And, as I walked down Fleet Street, the soft sky  
Flowed thro' the roaring thoroughfares, transfused  
Their hard sharp outlines, blurred the throngs of black  
On either pavement, blurred the rolling stream  
Of red and yellow busses, till the town  
Turned to a golden suburb of the clouds.  
And, round that mighty bubble of St. Paul's,  
Over the up-turned faces of the street,  
An air-ship slowly sailed, with whirring fans,  
A voyager in the new-found realms of gold,  
A shadowy silken chrysalis whence should break  
What radiant wings in centuries to be.

So, wandering on, while all the shores of Time  
Softened into Eternity, it seemed  
A dead man touched me with his living hand,  
A flaming legend passed me in the streets  
Of London—laugh who will—that City of Clouds,  
Where what a dreamer yet, in spite of all,  
Is man, that splendid visionary child  
Who sent his fairy beacon through the dusk,  
On a blue bus before the moon was risen,—  
*This Night, at eight, The Tempest!*

Dreaming thus,  
(Small wonder that my footsteps went astray!)  
I found myself within a narrow street,  
Alone. There was no rumour, near or far,  
Of the long tides of traffic. In my doubt  
I turned and knocked upon an old inn-door,

Hard by, an ancient inn of mullioned panes,  
And crazy beams and over-hanging eaves:  
And, as I knocked, the slowly changing west  
Seemed to change all the world with it and leave  
Only that old inn steadfast and unchanged,  
A rock in the rich-coloured tides of time.

And, suddenly, as a song that wholly escapes  
Remembrance, at one note, wholly returns,  
There, as I knocked, memory returned to me.  
I knew it all—the little twisted street,  
The rough wet cobbles gleaming, far away,  
Like opals, where it ended on the sky;  
And, overhead, the darkly smiling face  
Of that old wizard inn; I knew by rote  
The smooth sun-bubbles in the worn green paint  
Upon the doors and shutters.

There was one  
Myself had idly scratched away one dawn,  
One mad May-dawn, three hundred years ago,  
When out of the woods we came with hawthorn boughs  
And found the doors locked, as they seemed to-night.  
Three hundred years ago—nay, Time was dead!  
No need to scan the sign-board any more  
Where that white-breasted siren of the sea  
Curled her moon-silvered tail among such rocks  
As never in the merriest seaman's tale  
Broke the blue-bliss of fabulous lagoons  
Beyond the Spanish Main.

And, through the dream,  
Even as I stood and listened, came a sound  
Of clashing wine-cups: then a deep-voiced song  
Made the old timbers of the Mermaid Inn  
Shake as a galleon shakes in a gale of wind  
When she rolls glorying through the Ocean-sea.

## SONG

## I

Marchaunt Adventurers, chanting at the windlass,  
 Early in the morning, we slipped from Plymouth Sound,  
 All for Adventure in the great New Regions,

All for Eldorado and to sail the world around!

Sing! the red of sun-rise ripples round the bows again.

Marchaunt Adventurers, O sing, we're outward bound,  
 All to stuff the sunset in our old black galleon,

All to seek the merchandise that no man ever found.

*Chorus:*            Marchaunt Adventurers!

                  Marchaunt Adventurers!

Marchaunt Adventurers, O, whither are ye bound?—  
 All for Eldorado and the great new Sky-line,

All to seek the merchandise that no man ever found.

## II

Marchaunt Adventurers, O, what'll ye bring home again?—

Wonders and works and the thunder of the sea!

Whom will ye traffic with?—The King of the Sunset!

What shall be your pilot then?—A wind from Galilee.

Nay, but ye be marchaunts, will ye come back empty-handed?—

Ay, we be marchaunts, though our gain we ne'er shall see.

Cast we now our bread upon the waste wild waters.

After many days, it shall return with usury.

*Chorus:*            Marchaunt Adventurers!

                  Marchaunt Adventurers!

What shall be your profit in the mighty days to be?—

Englande!—Englande!—Englande!—Englande!—

Glory everlasting and the lordship of the sea!

And there, framed in the lilac patch of sky  
 That ended the steep street, dark on its light,  
 And standing on those glistering cobblestones  
 Just where they took the sunset's kiss, I saw  
 A figure like foot-feathered Mercury,  
 Tall, straight and splendid as a sunset-cloud.

Clad in a crimson doublet and trunk-hose,  
A rapier at his side; and, as he paused,  
His long fantastic shadow swayed and swept  
Against my feet.

A moment he looked back,  
Then swaggered down as if he owned a world  
Which had forgotten—did I wake or dream?—  
Even his gracious ghost!

Over his arm

He swung a gorgeous murrey-coloured cloak  
Of Cyprus velvet, caked and smeared with mud  
As on the day when—did I dream or wake?  
And had not all this happened once before?—  
When he had laid that cloak before the feet  
Of Gloriana! By that mud-stained cloak,  
'Twas he! Our Ocean-Shepherd! Walter Raleigh!  
He brushed me passing, and with one vigorous thrust  
Opened the door and entered. At his heels  
I followed—into the Mermaid!—through three yards  
Of pitch-black gloom, then into an old inn-parlour  
Swimming with faces in a mist of smoke  
That up-curled, blue, from long Winchester pipes,  
While—like some rare old picture, in a dream  
Recalled—quietly listening, laughing, watching,  
Pale on that old black oaken wainscot floated  
One bearded oval face, young, with deep eyes,  
Whom Raleigh hailed as "Will!"

But as I stared

A sudden buffet from a brawny hand  
Made all my senses swim, and the room rang  
With laughter as upon the rush-strewn floor  
My feet slipped and I fell. Then a gruff voice  
Growled over me—"Get up now, John-a-dreams,  
Or else mine host must find another drawer!  
Hast thou not heard us calling all this while?"  
And, as I scrambled up, the rafters rang  
With cries of "Sack! Bring me a cup of sack!  
Canary! Sack! Malmsey! and Muscadel!"  
I understood and flew. I was awake,  
A leather-jerkined pot-boy to these gods,  
A prentice Ganymede to the Mermaid Inn!

There, flitting to and fro with cups of wine,  
I heard them toss the Chrysomelan names  
From mouth to mouth—Lylly and Peele and Lodge,  
Kit Marlowe, Michael Drayton, and the rest,  
With Ben, rare Ben, brick-layer Ben, who rolled  
Like a great galleon on his ingle-bench.  
Some twenty years of age he seemed; and yet  
This young Gargantua with the bull-dog jaws,  
The T, for Tyburn, branded on his thumb,  
And grim pock-pitted face, was growling tales  
To Dekker that would fright a buccaneer,—  
How in the fierce Low Countries he had killed  
His man, and won that scar on his bronzed fist;  
Was taken prisoner, and turned Catholick;  
And, now returned to London, was resolved  
To blast away the vapours of the town  
With Boreas-throated plays of thunderous mirth.  
“I’ll thwack their Tribulation-Wholesomes, lad,  
Their Yellow-faced Envies and lean Thorns-i'-the-Flesh,  
At the *Black-friars Theatre*, or *The Rose*,  
Or else *The Curtain*. Failing these, I’ll find  
Some good square inn-yard with wide galleries,  
And windows level with the stage. ’Twill serve  
My Comedy of Vapours; though, I grant,  
For Tragedy a private House is best,  
Or, just as Burbage tip-toes to a deed  
Of blood, or, over your stable’s black half-door,  
Marked *Battlements* in white chalk, your breathless David  
Glowers at the whiter Bathsheba within,  
Some humorous coach-horse neighs a ‘hallelujah’!  
And the pit splits its doublets. Over goes  
The whole damned apple-barrel, and the yard  
Is all one rough and tumble, scramble and scratch  
Of prentices, green madams, and cut-purses  
For half-chewed Norfolk pippins. Never mind!  
We’ll build the perfect stage in Shoreditch yet.  
And Will, there, hath half promised I shall write  
A piece for his own company! What d’ye think  
Of *Venus and Adonis*, his first heir,  
Printed last week? A bouncing boy, my lad!  
And he’s at work on a *Midsummer’s Dream*  
That turns the world to fairyland!”

All these

And many more were there, and all were young!  
There, as I brimmed their cups, I heard the voice  
Of Raleigh ringing across the smoke-wreathed room,—  
“Ben, could you put a frigate on the stage,  
I’ve found a tragedy for you. Have you heard  
The true tale of Sir Humphrey Gilbert?”

“No!”

“Why, Ben, of all the tragical affairs  
Of the Ocean-sea, and of that other Ocean  
Where all men sail so blindly, and misjudge  
Their friends, their charts, their storms, their stars, their God,  
If there be truth in the blind crowder’s song  
I bought in Bread Street for a penny, this  
Is the brief type and chronicle of them all.  
Listen!” Then Raleigh sent these rugged rhymes  
Of some blind crowder rolling in great waves  
Of passion across the gloom. At each refrain  
He sank his voice to a broad deep undertone,  
As if the distant roar of breaking surf  
Or the low thunder of eternal tides  
Filled up the pauses of the nearer storm,  
Storm against storm, a soul against the sea:—

A KNIGHT OF THE OCEAN-SEA

Sir Humphrey Gilbert, hard of hand,  
Knight-in-chief of the Ocean-sea,  
Gazed from the rocks of his New Found Land  
And thought of the home where his heart would be.

He gazed across the wintry waste  
That weltered and hissed like molten lead,—  
“He saileth twice who saileth in haste!  
I’ll wait the favour of Spring,” he said.

*Ever the more, ever the more,  
He heard the winds and the waves roar!  
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.*

The yellow clots of foam went by  
Like shavings that curl from a ship-wright's plane,  
Clinging and flying, afar and nigh,  
Shuddering, flying and clinging again.

A thousand bubbles in every one  
Shifted and shimmered with rainbow gleams;  
But—had they been planets and stars that spun  
He had let them drift by his feet like dreams:

Heavy of heart was our Admirall,  
For, out of his ships—and they were but three!—  
He had lost the fairest and most tall,  
And—he was a Knight of the Ocean-sea.

*Ever the more, ever the more,  
He heard the winds and the waves roar!  
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.*

Heavy of heart, heavy of heart,  
For she was a galleon mighty as May,  
And the storm that ripped her glory apart  
Had stripped his soul for the winter's way;

And he was aware of a whisper blown  
From foc'sle to poop, from windward to lee,  
That the fault was his, and his alone,  
And—he was a Knight of the Ocean-sea.

“Had he done that! Had he done this!”  
And yet his mariners loved him well;  
But an idle word is hard to miss,  
And the foam hides more than the deep can tell.

And the deep had buried his best-loved books,  
With many a hard-worn chart and plan:  
And a king that is conquered must see strange looks,  
So bitter a thing is the heart of man!

And—"Who will you find to pay your debt?  
For a venture like this is a costly thing!  
Will they stake yet more, tho' your heart be set  
On the mightier voyage you planned for the Spring?"

He raised his head like a Viking crowned,—  
"I'll take my old flag to her Majestie,  
And she will lend me ten thousand pound  
To make her Queen of the Ocean-sea!"

*Ever the more, ever the more,  
He heard the winds and the waves roar!  
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.*

Outside—they heard the great winds blow!  
Outside—the blustering surf they heard,  
And the bravest there would ha' blenched to know  
That they must be taken at their own word.

For the great grim waves were as molten lead  
—And he had two ships who sailed with three!—  
"And I sail not home till the Spring," he said,  
"They are all too frail for the Ocean-sea."

But the trumpeter thought of an ale-house bench,  
And the cabin-boy longed for a Devonshire lane,  
And the gunner remembered a green-gowned wench,  
And the fos'cle whisper went round again,—

"Sir Humphrey Gilbert is hard of hand,  
But his courage went down with the ship, may-be,  
And we wait for the Spring in a desert land,  
For—he is afraid of the Ocean-sea."

*Ever the more, ever the more,  
He heard the winds and the waves roar!  
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.*

He knew, he knew how the whisper went!  
 He knew he must master it, last or first!  
 He knew not how much or how little it meant;  
 But his heart was heavy and like to burst.

"Up with your sails, my sea-dogs all!  
 The wind has veered! And my ships," quoth he,  
 "They will serve for a British Admirall  
 Who is Knight-in-chief of the Ocean-sea!"

His will was like a North-east wind  
 That swept along our helmless crew;  
 But he would not stay on the *Golden Hynde*,  
 For that was the stronger ship of the two.

"My little ship's-company, lads, hath passed  
 Perils and storms a-many with me!  
 Would ye have me forsake them at the last?  
 They'll need a Knight of the Ocean-sea!"

*Ever the more, ever the more,  
 We heard the winds and the waves roar!  
 Thunder on thunder shook the shore.*

Beyond Cape Race, the pale sun splashed  
 The grim grey waves with silver light  
 Where, ever in front, his frigate crashed  
 Eastward, for England and the night.

And still as the dark began to fall,  
 Ever in front of us, running free,  
 We saw the sails of our Admirall  
 Leading us home through the Ocean-sea.

*Ever the more, ever the more,  
 We heard the winds and the waves roar!  
 But he sailed on, sailed on before.*

On Monday, at noon of the third fierce day  
A-board our *Golden Hynde* he came,  
With a trail of blood, marking his way  
On the salt wet decks as he walked half-lame.

For a rusty nail thro' his foot had pierc'd.  
"Come, master-surgeon, mend it for me;  
Though I would it were changed for the nails that amerced  
The dying thief upon Calvary."

The surgeon bathed and bound his foot,  
And the master entreated him sore to stay;  
But roughly he pulled on his great sea-boot  
With—"The wind is rising and I must away!"

I know not why so little a thing,  
When into his pinnace we helped him down,  
Should make our eyelids prick and sting  
As the salt spray were into them blown,

But he called as he went—"Keep watch and steer  
By my lanthorn at night!" Then he waved his hand  
With a kinglier watch-word, "We are as near  
To heaven, my lads, by sea as by land!"

*Ever the more, ever the more,  
We heard the gathering tempest roar!  
But he sailed on, sailed on before.*

Three hundred leagues on our homeward road,  
We strove to signal him, swooping nigh,  
That he would ease his decks of their load  
Of nettings and fights and artillery.

And dark and dark that night 'gan fall,  
And high the muttering breakers swelled,  
Till that strange fire which seamen call  
"Castor and Pollux," we beheld,

An evil sign of peril and death,  
    Burning pale on the high main-mast;  
But calm with the might of Gennesareth  
    Our Admirall's voice went ringing past.

Clear thro' the thunders, far and clear,  
    Mighty to counsel, clear to command,  
Joyfully ringing, "We are as near  
    To heaven, my lads, by sea as by land!"

*Ever the more, ever the more,  
We heard the rising hurricane roar!  
But he sailed on, sailed on before.*

And over us fled the fleet of the stars,  
    And, ever in front of us, far or nigh,  
The lanthorn on his cross-tree spars  
    Dipped to the Pit or soared to the Sky!

'Twould sweep to the lights of Charles's Wain,  
    As the hills of the deep 'ud mount and flee,  
Then swoop down vanishing cliffs again  
    To the thundering gulfs of the Ocean-sea.

We saw it shine as it swooped from the height,  
    With ruining breakers on every hand,  
Then—a cry came out of the black mid-night,  
    *As near to heaven by sea as by land!*

And the light was out! Like a wind-blown spark,  
    All in a moment! And we—and we—  
Prayed for his soul as we swept thro' the dark;  
    For he was a Knight of the Ocean-sea.

*Over our fleets for evermore  
The winds 'ull triumph and the waves roar!  
But he sails on, sails on before!*

Silence a moment held the Mermaid Inn,  
Then Michael Drayton, raising a cup of wine,  
Stood up and said,—“Since many have obtained  
Absolute glory that have done great deeds,  
But fortune is not in the power of man,  
So they that, truly attempting, nobly fail,  
Deserve great honour of the common-wealth.  
Such glory did the Greeks and Romans give  
To those that in great enterprises fell  
Seeking the true commodity of their country  
And profit to all mankind; for, though they failed,  
Being by war, death, or some other chance,  
Hindered, their images were set up in brass,  
Marble and silver, gold and ivory,  
In solemn temples and great palace-halls,  
No less to make men emulate their virtues  
Than to give honour to their just deserts.  
God, from the time that He first made the world,  
Hath kept the knowledge of His Ocean-sea  
And the huge *Aequinoctiall Continents*  
Reserved unto this day. Wherefore I think  
No high exploit of Greece and Rome but seems  
A little thing to these Discoveries  
Which our adventurous captains even now  
Are making, out there, Westward, in the night,  
Captains most worthy of commendation,  
Hugh Willoughby—God send him home again  
Safe to the Mermaid!—and Dick Chauncellor,  
That excellent pilot. Doubtless this man, too,  
Sir Humphrey Gilbert, was worthy to be made  
Knight of the Ocean-sea. I bid you all  
Stand up, and drink to his immortal fame!”

## II

## A COINER OF ANGELS

SOME three nights later, thro' the thick brown fog,  
A link-boy, dropping flakes of crimson fire,  
Flared to the door and, through its glowing frame,

Ben Jonson and Kit Marlowe, arm in arm,  
Swaggered into the Mermaid Inn and called  
For red-deer pies.

There, as they supped, I caught  
Scraps of ambrosial talk concerning Will,  
His *Venus and Adonis*.

“Gabriel thought  
‘Twas wrong to change the old writers and ereate  
A cold Adonis.”

—“Laws were made for Will,  
Not Will for laws, since first he stole a buck  
In Charlecote woods.”

—“Where never a buck chewed fern.”  
Laughed Kit, “unless it chewed the fern seed, too,  
And walked invisible.”

“Bring me some wine,” ealled Ben,  
And, with his knife thrumming upon the board,  
He chanted, while his eomrade munched and smiled.

## I

Will Shakespeare's out like Robin Hood  
With his merry men all in green,  
To steal a deer in Charleeote wood  
Where never a deer was seen.

## II

He's hunted all a night of June,  
He's followed a phantom horn,  
He's killed a buck by the light of the moon,  
Under a fairy thorn.

## III

He's carried it home with his merry, merry band,  
There never was hauneh so fine;  
For this buck was born in Elfin-land  
And fed upon sops-in-wine.

## IV

This buck had browsed on elfin boughs  
 Of rose-marie and bay,  
 And he's carried it home to the little white house  
 Of sweet Anne Hathaway.

## V

"The dawn above your thatch is red!  
 Slip out of your bed, sweet Anne!  
 I have stolen a fairy buck," he said,  
 "The first since the world began.

## VI

"Roast it on a golden spit,  
 And see that it do not burn;  
 For we never shall feather the like of it  
 Out of the fairy fern."

## VII

She scarce had donned her long white gown  
 And given him kisses four,  
 When the surly Sheriff of Stratford-town  
 Knocked at the little green door.

## VIII

They have gaoled sweet Will for a poacher;  
 But squarely he fronts the squire,  
 With "When did you hear in your woods of a deer?  
 Was it under a fairy briar?"

## IX

Sir Thomas he puffs,—"If God thought good  
 My water-butt ran with wine,  
 Or He dropt me a buck in Charlecote wood,  
 I wot it is mine, not thine!"

## X

"If you would eat of elfin meat,"  
Says Will, "you must blow up your horn!  
Take your bow, and feather the doe  
That's under the fairy thorn!"

## XI

"If you would feast on elfin food,  
You've only the way to learn!  
Take your bow and feather the doe  
That's under the fairy fern!"

## XII

They're hunting high, they're hunting low,  
They're all away, away,  
With horse and hound to feather the doe  
That's under the fairy spray!

## XIII

Sir Thomas he raged! Sir Thomas he swore!  
But all and all in vain;  
For there never was deer in his woods before,  
And there never would be again!

And, as I brought the wine—"This is my grace,"  
Laughed Kit, "Diana grant the jolly buck  
That Shakespeare stole were toothsome as this pie."

He suddenly sank his voice,—"Hist, who comes here?  
Look—Richard Bame, the Puritan! O, Ben, Ben,  
Your Mermaid Inn's the study for the stage,  
Your only teacher of exits, entrances,  
And all the shifting comedy. Be grave!  
Bame is the godliest hypocrite on earth!  
Remember I'm an atheist, black as coal.

He has called me Wormall in an anagram.  
Help me to bait him; but be very grave.  
We'll talk of Venus."

As he whispered thus,  
A long white face with small black-beaded eyes  
Peered at him through the doorway. All too well,  
Afterwards, I recalled that scene, when Bame,  
Out of revenge for this same night, I guessed,  
Penned his foul tract on Marlowe's tragic fate;  
And, twelve months later, I watched our Puritan  
Riding to Tyburn in the hangman's cart  
For thieving from an old bed-ridden dame  
With whom he prayed, at supper-time, on Sundays.

Like a conspirator he sidled in,  
Clasping a little pamphlet to his breast,  
While, feigning not to see him, Ben began:—

"Will's *Venus and Adonis*, Kit, is rare,  
A round, sound, full-blown piece of thorough work,  
On a great canvas, coloured like one I saw  
In Italy, by one—Titian! None of the toys  
Of artistry your lank-haired losels turn,  
Your Phyllida—Love-lies-bleeding—Kiss-me-Quicks,  
Your fluttering Sighs and Mark-how-I-break-my-beats,  
Begotten like this, whenever and how you list,  
Your Moths of verse that shrivel in every taper;  
But a sound piece of craftsmanship to last  
Until the stars are out. 'Tis twice the length  
Of Vergil's books—he's listening! Nay, don't look!—  
Two hundred solid stanzas, think of that;  
But each a square celestial brick of gold  
Laid level and splendid. I've laid bricks and know  
What thorough work is. If a storm should shake  
The Tower of London down, Will's house would stand.  
Look at his picture of the stallion,  
Nostril to croup, that's thorough finished work!"

"'Twill shock our Tribulation-Wholesomes, Ben!  
Think of that kiss of Venus! Deep, sweet, slow,

As the dawn breaking to its perfect flower  
 And golden moon of bliss; then slow, sweet, deep,  
 Like a great honeyed sunset it dissolves  
 Away!"

A hollow groan, like a bass viol,  
 Resounded thro' the room. Up started Kit  
 In feigned alarm—"What, Master Richard Bame!  
 Quick, Ben, the good man's ill. Bring him some wine!  
 Red wine for Master Bame, the blood of Venus  
 That stained the rose!"

"White wine for Master Bame,"  
 Ben echoed, "Juno's cream that" . . . Both at once  
 They thrust a wine-cup to the sallow lips  
 And smote him on the back.  
 "Sirs, you mistake!" coughed Bame, waving his hand  
 And struggling to his feet,

"Sirs, I have brought  
 A message from a youth who walked with you  
 In wantonness, aforetime, and is now  
 Groaning in sulphurous fires!"

"Kit, that means hell!"  
 "Yea, sirs, a pamphlet from the pit of hell,  
 Written by Robert Greene before he died.  
 Mark what he styles it—*A Groatsworth of Wit*  
*Bought with a Million of Repentance!*"

"Ah,  
 Poor Rob was all his life-time either drunk,  
 Wenching, or penitent, Ben! Poor lad, he died  
 Young. Let me see now, Master Bame, you say  
 Rob Greene wrote this on earth before he died,  
 And then you printed it yourself in hell!"  
 "Stay, sir, I came not to this haunt of sin  
 To make mirth for Beëlzebub!"

"O, Ben,  
 That's you!"

"'Swounds, sir, am I Beëlzebub?  
 Ogs-gogs!" roared Ben, his hand upon his hilt!  
 "Nay, sir, I signified the god of flies!  
 I spake out of the scriptures!" snuffled Bame  
 With deprecating eye.

"I come to save

A brand that you have kindled at your fire,  
 But not yet charred, not yet so far consumed,  
 One Richard Cholmeley, who declares to all  
 He was persuaded to turn atheist  
 By Marlowe's reasoning. I have wrestled with him,  
 But find him still so constant to your words  
 That only you can save him from the fire."  
 "Why, Master Bame," said Kit, "had I the keys  
 To hell, the damned should all come out and dance  
 A morrice round the Mermaid Inn to-night."  
 "Nay, sir, the damned are damned!"

"Come, sit you down!

Take some more wine! You'd have them all be damned  
 Except Dick Cholmeley. What must I unsay  
 To save him?" A quick eyelid dropt at Ben.  
 "Now tell me, Master Bame!"

"Sir, he derides

The books of Moses!"

"Bame, do you believe?—

There's none to hear us but Beëlzebub—  
 Do you believe that we must taste of death  
 Because God set a foolish naked wench  
 Too near an apple-tree, how long ago?  
 Five thousand years? But there were men on earth  
 Long before that!" "Nay, nay, sir, if you read  
 The books of Moses . . ." "Moses was a juggler!"  
 "A juggler, sir, how, what?" "Nay, sir, be calm!  
 Take some more wine—the white, if that's too red!  
 I never cared for Moses! Help yourself  
 To red-deer pie. Good!

All the miracles

You say that he performed—why, what are they?  
 I know one Heriots, lives in Friday Street,  
 Can do much more than Moses! Eat your pie  
 In patience, friend, the mouth of man performs  
 One good work at a time. What says he, Ben?  
 The red-deer stops his—what? Sticks in his gizzard?  
 O—led them through the wilderness! No doubt  
 He did—for forty years, and might have made  
 The journey in six months. Believe me, sir,

That is no miracle. Moses gulled the Jews!  
Skilled in the sly tricks of the Egyptians,  
Only one art betrayed him. Sir, his books  
Are filthily written. I would undertake—  
If I were put to write a new religion—  
A method far more admirable. Eh, what?  
*Gruel in the vestibule?* Interpret, Ben!  
His mouth's too full! *O, the New Testament!*  
Why, there, consider, were not all the Apostles  
Fishermen and base fellows, without wit  
Or worth?"—again his eyelid dropt at Ber—  
"The Apostle Paul alone had wit, and he  
Was a most timorous fellow in bidding us  
Prostrate ourselves to worldly magistrates  
Against our conscience! I shall fry for this?  
I fear no bugbears or hobgoblins, sir,  
And would have all men not to be afraid  
Of roasting, toasting, pitch-forks, or the threats  
Of earthly ministers, tho' their mouths be stuffed  
With curses or with crusts of red-deer pie!  
One thing I will confess—if I must choose—  
Give me the Papists that can serve their God  
Not with your scraps, but solemn ceremonies,  
Organs, and singing men, and shaven crowns.  
Your protestant is a hypocritical ass!"

"Profligate! You blaspheme!" Up started Bame,  
A little unsteady now upon his feet,  
And shaking his crumpled pamphlet over his head!

"Nay—if your pie be done, you shall partake  
A second course. Be seated, sir, I pray.  
We atheists will pay the reckoning!  
I had forgotten that a Puritan  
Will swallow Moses like a red-deer pie  
Yet choke at a wax-candle! Let me read  
Your pamphlet. What, 'tis half addressed to me!  
Ogs-gogs! Ben! Hark to this—the Testament  
Of poor Rob Greene would cut Will Shakespeare off  
With less than his own Groatsworth! Hark to this!"  
And there, unseen by them, a quiet figure

Entered the room and beckoning me for wine  
 Seated himself to listen, Will himself,  
 While Marlowe read aloud with knitted brows.  
 “‘Trust them not; for there is an upstart crow  
 Beautified with our feathers!’”

—O, he bids

All green eyes open:—‘And, being an absolute  
*Johannes fac-totum is in his own conceit*  
*The only Shake-scene in a country!*’”

“Feathers!”

Exploded Ben. “Why, come to that, he pouched  
 Your eagle’s feather of blank verse, and lit  
 His Friar Bacon’s little magic lamp  
 At the Promethean fire of Faustus. Jove,  
 It was a faery buck, indeed, that Will  
 Poached in that greenwood.”

“Ben, see that you walk

Like Adam, naked! Nay, in nakedness  
 Adam was first. Trust me, you’ll not escape  
 This calumny! Vergil is damned—he wears  
 A hen-coop round his waist, nicked in the night  
 From Homer! Plato is branded for a thief,  
 Why, he wrote Greek! And old Prometheus, too,  
 Who stole his fire from heaven!”

“Who printed it?”

“Chettle! I know not why, unless he too  
 Be one of these same dwarfs that find the world  
 Too narrow for their jealousies. Ben, Ben,  
 I tell thee ’tis the dwarfs that find no world  
 Wide enough for their jostling, while the giants,  
 The gods themselves, can in one tavern find  
 Room wide enough to swallow the wide heaven  
 With all its crowded solitary stars.”

“Why, then, the Mermaid Inn should swallow this,”  
 The voice of Shakespeare quietly broke in,  
 As laying a hand on either shoulder of Kit  
 He stood behind him in the gloom and smiled  
 Across the table at Ben, whose eyes still blazed  
 With boyhood’s generous wrath. “Rob was a poet.  
 And had I known . . . no matter! I am sorry

He thought I wronged him. His heart's blood beats in this.  
Look, where he says he dies forsaken, Kit!"

"Died drunk, more like," growled Ben. "And if he did,"  
Will answered, "none was there to help him home,  
Had not a poor old cobbler chanced upon him,  
Dying in the streets, and taken him to his house,  
And let him break his heart on his own bed.  
Read his last words. You know he left his wife  
And played the moth at tavern tapers, burnt  
His wings and dropt into the mud. Read here,  
His dying words to his forsaken wife,  
Written in blood, Ben, blood. Read it, '*I charge thee,*  
*Doll, by the love of our youth, by my soul's rest,*  
*See this man paid! Had he not succoured me*  
*I had died in the streets.*' How young he was to call  
Thus on their poor dead youth, this withered shadow  
That once was Robin Greene. He left a child—  
See—in its face he prays her not to find  
The father's, but her own. '*He is yet green*  
*And may grow straight,'* so flickers his last jest,  
Then out for ever. At the last he begged  
A penny-pott of malmsey. In the bill,  
All's printed now for crows and daws to peck,  
You'll find four shillings for his winding sheet.  
He had the poet's heart and God help all  
Who have that heart and somehow lose their way  
For lack of helm, souls that are blown abroad  
By the great winds of passion, without power  
To sway them, chartless captains. Multitudes ply  
Trimly enough from bank to bank of Thames  
Like shallow wherries, while tall galleons,  
Out of their very beauty driven to dare  
The uncompassed sea, founder in starless nights,  
And all that we can say is—'They died drunk!'"

"I have it from veracious witnesses,"  
Bame snuffled, "that the death of Robert Greene  
Was caused by a surfeit, sir, of Rhenish wine  
And pickled herrings. Also, sir, that his shirt  
Was very foul, and while it was at wash  
He lay i' the cobbler's old blue smock, sir!"

"Gods,"

The voice of Raleigh muttered nigh mine ear,  
"I had a dirty cloak once on my arm;  
But a Queen's feet had trodden it! Drawer, take  
Yon pamphlet, have it fried in cod-fish oil  
And bring it hither. Bring a candle, too,  
And sealing-wax! Be quick. The rogue shall eat it,  
And then I'll seal his lips."

"No—not to-night,"

Kit whispered, laughing, "I've a prettier plan  
For Master Bane."

"As for that scrap of paper,"

The voice of Shakespeare quietly resumed,  
"Why, which of us could send his heart and soul  
Thro' Caxton's printing-press and hope to find  
The pretty pair unmangled. I'll not trust  
The spoken word, no, not of my own lips,  
Before the Judgment Throne against myself  
Or on my own defence; and I'll not trust  
The printed word to mirror Robert Greene.  
See—here's another Testament, in blood,  
Written, not printed, for the Mermaid Inn.  
Rob sent it from his death-bed straight to me.  
Read it. 'Tis for the Mermaid Inn alone;  
And when 'tis read, we'll burn it, as he asks."

Then, from the hands of Shakespeare, Marlowe took  
A little scroll, and, while the winds without  
Rattled the shutters with their ghostly hands  
And wailed among the chimney-tops, he read:—

Greeting to all the Mermaid Inn  
From their old Vice and Slip of Sin,  
Greeting, Ben, to you, and you  
Will Shakespeare and Kit Marlowe, too.  
Greeting from your Might-have-been,  
Your broken sapling, Robert Greene.

Read my letter—'Tis my last,  
Then let Memory blot me out,  
I would not make my maudlin past  
A trough for every swinish snout.

First, I leave a debt unpaid,  
It's all chalked up, not much all told,  
For Bread and Sack. When I am cold,  
Doll can pawn my Spanish blade  
And pay mine host. She'll pay mine host!  
But . . . I have chalked up other scores  
In your own hearts, behind the doors,  
Not to be paid so quickly. Yet,  
O, if you would not have my ghost  
Creeping in at dead of night,  
Out of the cold wind, out of the wet,  
With weeping face and helpless fingers  
Trying to wipe the marks away,  
Read what I can write, still write,  
While this life within them lingers.  
Let me pay, lads, let me pay.

*Item*, for a peacock phrase,  
Flung out in a sudden blaze,  
Flung out at his friend Shake-scene,  
By this ragged Might-have-been,  
This poor Jackdaw, Robert Greene.

Will, I knew it all the while!  
And you know it—and you smile!  
My quill was but a Jackdaw's feather,  
While the quill that Ben, there, wields,  
Fluttered down thro' azure fields,  
From an eagle in the sun;  
And yours, Will, yours, no earth-born thing,  
A plume of rainbow-tinctured grain,  
Dropt out of an angel's wing.  
Only a Jackdaw's feather mine,  
And mine ran ink, and Ben's ran wine,  
And yours the pure Pierian streams.

But I had dreams, O, I had dreams!  
Dreams, you understand me, Will;  
And I fretted at the tether  
That bound me to the lowly plain,  
Gnawed my heart out, for I knew  
Once, tho' that was long ago.

I might have risen with Ben and you  
Somewhere near that Holy Hill  
Whence the living rivers flow.  
Let it pass. I did not know  
One bitter phrase could ever fly  
So far through that immortal sky  
—Seeing all my songs had flown so low—  
One envious phrase that cannot die  
From century to century.

Kit Marlowe ceased a moment, and the wind,  
As if indeed the night were all one ghost,  
Wailed round the Mermaid Inn, then sent once more  
Its desolate passion through the reader's voice:—

Some truth there was in what I said.  
Kit Marlowe taught you half your trade;  
And something of the rest you learned  
From me,—but all you took you earned.  
You took the best I had to give,  
You took my clay and made it live;  
And that—why that's what God must do!—  
My music made for mortal ears  
You flung to all the listening spheres.  
You took my dreams and made them true.  
And, if I claimed them, the blank air  
Might claim the breath I shape to prayer.  
I do not claim it! Let the earth  
Claim the thrones she brings to birth.  
Let the first shapers of our tongue  
Claim whate'er is said or sung,  
Till the doom repeal that debt  
And cancel the first alphabet.  
Yet when, like a god, you scaled  
The shining crags where my foot failed;  
When I saw my fruit of the vine  
Foam in the Olympian cup,  
Or in that broader chalice shine  
Blood-red, a sacramental drink,  
With stars for bubbles, lifted up,

Through the universal night,  
Up to the celestial brink,  
Up to that quintessential Light  
Where God acclaimed you for the wine  
Crushed from those poor grapes of mine;  
O, you'll understand, no doubt,  
How the poor vine-dresser fell,  
How a pin-prick can let out  
All the bannered hosts of hell,  
Nay, a knife-thrust, the sharp truth—  
I had spilt my wine of youth,  
The Temple was not mine to build.  
My place in the world's march was filled.

Yet—through all the years to come—  
Men to whom my songs are dumb  
Will remember them and me  
For that one cry of jealousy,  
That curse where I had come to bless,  
That harsh voice of unhappiness.  
They'll note the curse, but not the pang,  
Not the torment whence it sprang,  
They'll note the blow at my friend's back,  
But not the soul stretched on the rack.  
They'll note the weak convulsive sting,  
Not the crushed body and broken wing.

*Item*, for my thirty years,  
Dashed with sun and splashed with tears,  
Wan with revel, red with wine,  
This Jack-o-lanthorn life of mine.  
Other wiser, happier men,  
Take the full three-score-and-ten,  
Climb slow, and seek the sun.  
Dancing down is soon done.  
Golden boys, beware, beware,—  
The ambiguous oracles declare  
Loving gods for those that die  
Young, as old men may; but I,  
Quick as was my pilgrimage,  
Wither in mine April age.

*Item*, one groatsworth of wit,  
Bought at an exceeding price,  
Ay, a million of repentance.  
Let me pay the whole of it.  
Lying here these deadly nights,  
Lads, for me the Mermaid lights  
Gleam as for a castaway  
Swept along a midnight sea  
The harbour-lanthorns, each a spark,  
A pin-prick in the solid dark,  
That lets trickle through a ray  
Glorious out of Paradise,  
To stab him with new agony.  
Let me pay, lads, let me pay!  
Let the Mermaid pass the sentence:  
I am pleading guilty now,  
A dead leaf on the laurel-bough,  
And the storm whirls me away.

Kit Marlowe ceased; but not the wailing wind  
That round and round the silent Mermaid Inn  
Wandered, with helpless fingers trying the doors,  
Like a most desolate ghost.

A sudden throng  
Of players bustled in, shaking the rain  
From their plumed hats. "Veracious witnesses,"  
The snuffle of Bame arose anew, "declare  
It was a surfeit killed him, Rhenish wine  
And pickled herrings. His shirt was very foul.  
He had but one. His doublet, too, was frayed,  
And his boots broken . . . ."

"What! Gonzago, you!"

A short fat player called in a deep voice  
Across the room and, throwing aside his cloak  
To show the woman's robe he wore beneath,  
Mince up to Bame and bellowed—" 'Tis such men  
As you that tempt us women to our fall!"  
And all the throng of players rocked and roared,  
Till at a nod and wink from Kit a hush  
Held them again.

"Look to the door," he said,  
 "Is any listening?" The young player crept,  
 A mask of mystery, to the door and peeped.  
 "All's well! The coast is clear!"

"Then shall we tell

Our plan to Master Bame?"

Round the hushed room  
 Went Kit, a pen and paper in his hand,  
 Whispering each to read, digest, and sign,  
 While Ben re-filled the glass of Master Bame.  
 "And now," said Kit aloud, "what think you, lads?  
 Shall he be told?" Solemnly one or two  
 'Gan shake their heads with "Safety! safety! Kit!"  
 "O, Bame can keep a secret! Come, we'll tell him!  
 He can advise us how a righteous man  
 Should act! We'll let him share an he approve.  
 Now, Master Bame,—come closer—my good friend,  
 Ben Jonson here, hath lately found a way  
 Of—hush! Come closer!—coining money, Bame."  
 "Coining!" "Ay, hush, now! Hearken! A certain sure  
 And indiscernable method, sir!  
 He is acquainted with one Poole, a felon  
 Lately released from Newgate, hath great skill  
 In mixture of metals—hush!—and, by the help  
 Of a right cunning maker of stamps, we mean  
 To coin French crowns, rose-nobles, pistolettes,  
 Angels and English shillings."

For one breath

Bame stared at him with bulging beetle-eyes,  
 Then murmured shyly as a country maid  
 In her first wooing, "Is't not against the law?"  
 "Why, sir, who makes the law? Why should not Bame  
 Coin his own crowns like Queen Elizabeth?  
 She is but mortal! And consider, too,  
 The good works it should prosper in your hands,  
 Without regard to red-deer pies and wine  
 White as the Milky Way. Such secrets, Bame,  
 Were not good for the general; but a few  
 Discreet and righteous palms, your own, my friend,  
 And mine,—what think you?"

With a hesitant glance

Of well-nigh child-like cunning, screwing his eyes,  
Bame laughed a little huskily and looked round  
At that grave ring of anxious faces, all  
Holding their breath and thrilling his blunt nerves  
With their stage-practice. "And no risk?" breathed Bame,  
"No risk at all?" "O, sir, no risk at all!  
We make the very coins. Besides, that part  
Touches not you. Yours is the honest face,  
That's all we want."

"Why, sir, if you be sure  
There is no risk . . ."

"You'll help to spend it. Good!

We'll talk anon of this, and you shall carry  
More angels in your pocket, master Bame,  
Than e'er you'll meet in heaven. Set hand on seal  
To this now, master Bame, to prove your faith.  
Come, all have signed it. Here's the quill, dip, write.  
Good!"

And Kit, pocketing the paper, bowed  
The gull to the inn-door, saying as he went,—  
"You shall hear further when the plan's complete.  
But there's one great condition—not one word,  
One breath of scandal more on Robert Greene.  
He's dead; but he was one of us. The day  
You air his shirt, I air this paper, too."  
No gleam of understanding, even then,  
Illumed that long white face: no stage, indeed,  
Has known such acting as the Mermaid Inn  
That night, and Bame but sniggered, "Why, of course,  
There's good in all men; and the best of us  
Will make mistakes."

"But no mistakes in this,"  
Said Kit, "or all together we shall swing  
At Tyburn—who knows what may leap to light?—  
You understand? No scandal!" "Not a breath!"  
So, in dead silence, Master Richard Bame  
Went out into the darkness and the night,  
To ask, as I have heard, for many a moon,  
The price of malmsey-butts and silken hose,  
And doublets slashed with satin.

As the door

Slammed on his back, the pent-up laughter burst  
 With echo and re-echo round the room,  
 But ceased as Will tossed on the glowing hearth  
 The last poor Testament of Robert Greene.  
 All watched it burn. The black wind wailed and moaned  
 Around the Mermaid as the sparks flew up.  
 "God, what a night for ships upon the sea,"  
 Said Raleigh, peering through the wet black panes,  
 "Well—we may thank Him for the Little Red Ring!"  
 "*The Little Red Ring*," cried Kit, "*the Little Red Ring!*"  
 Then up stood Dekker on the old black settle.  
 "Give it a thumping chorus, lads," he called,  
 And sang this brave song of the Mermaid Inn:—

## I

Seven wise men on an old black settle,  
 Seven wise men of the Mermaid Inn,  
 Ringing blades of the one right metal,  
 What is the best that a blade can win?  
 Bread and cheese, and a few small kisses?  
 Ha! ha! ha! Would you take them—you?  
 —Ay, if Dame Venus would add to her blisses  
 A roaring fire and a friend or two!

*Chorus:* Up now, answer me, tell me true!—  
 —Ay, if the hussy would add to her blisses  
 A roaring fire and a friend or two!

## II

What will you say when the world is dying?  
 What, when the last wild midnight falls  
 Dark, too dark for the bat to be flying  
 Round the ruins of old St. Paul's?  
 What will be last of the lights to perish?  
 What but the little red ring we knew,  
 Lighting the hands and the hearts that cherish  
 A fire, a fire, and a friend or two!

*Chorus:* Up now, answer me, tell me true!  
 What will be last of the stars to perish?  
 —The fire that lighteth a friend or two!

## III

Up now, answer me, on your mettle  
 Wisest man of the Mermaid Inn,  
 Soberest man on the old black settle,—  
 Out with the truth! It was never a sin.—  
 Well, if God saved me alone of the seven,  
 Telling me *you* must be damned, or *you*,  
 "This," I would say, "This is hell, not heaven!"  
 Give me the fire and a friend or two!"

*Chorus:* Steel was never so ringing true:  
 "God," we would say, "this is hell, not heaven!"  
 Give us the fire, and a friend or two!"

## III

## BLACK BILL'S HONEY-MOON

THE garlands of a Whitsun ale were strewn  
 About our rushes, the night that Raleigh brought  
 Bacon to sup with us. There, on that night,  
 I saw the singer of the *Faërie Queen*  
 Quietly spreading out his latest cantos  
 For Shakespeare's eye, like white sheets in the sun.  
 Marlowe, our morning-star, and Michael Drayton  
 Talked in that ingle-nook. And Ben was there,  
 Humming a song upon that old black settle:

"Or leave a kiss but in the cup  
 And I'll not ask for wine."

But, meanwhile, he drank malmsey.

Francis Bacon

Straddled before the fire; and, all at once,  
 He said to Shakespeare, in a voice that gripped  
 The Mermaid Tavern like an arctic frost:

*"There are no poets in this age of ours,  
Not to compare with Plautus. They are all  
Dead, the men that were famous in old days."*

"Why—so they are," said Will. The humming stopped.  
I saw poor Spenser, a shy gentle soul,  
With haunted eyes like starlit forest pools,  
Smuggling his cantos under his cloak again.  
"There's verse enough, no doubt," Bacon went on,  
"But English is no language for the Muse.  
Whom would you call our best? There's Gabriel Harvey,  
And Edward, Earl of Oxford. Then there's Dyer,  
And Doctor Golding; while, for tragedy,  
Thomas, Lord Buckhurst, hath a lofty vein.  
And, in a lighter prettier vein, why, Will,  
There is *thyself!* But—where's Euripides?"

"Dead," echoed Ben, in a deep ghost-like voice.  
And drip—drip—drip—outside we heard the rain  
Miserably dropping round the Mermaid Inn.

"Thy Summer's Night—eh, Will? Midsummer's Night?—  
That's a quaint fancy," Bacon droned anew,  
"But—Athens was an error, Will! Not Athens!  
Titania knew not Athens! Those wild elves  
Of thy Midsummer's Dream—eh? Midnight's Dream?—  
Are English all. Thy woods, too, smack of England;  
They never grew round Athens. Bottom, too,  
He is not Greek!"

"Greek?" Will said, with a chuckle,  
"Bottom a Greek? Why, no, he was the son  
Of Marian Hacket, the fat wife that kept  
An ale-house, Wincot-way. I lodged with her  
Walking from Stratford. You have never tramped  
Along that countryside? By Burton Heath?  
Ah, well, you would not know my fairylands.  
It warms my blood to let my home-spuns play  
Around your cold white Athens. There's a joy  
In jumping time and space."

But, as he took  
The cup of sack I proffered, solemnly  
The lawyer shook his head. "Will, couldst thou use

Thy talents with discretion, and obey  
 Classic examples, those mightst match old Plautus,  
 In all except priority of the tongue.  
 This English tongue is only for an age,  
 But Latin for all time. So I propose  
 To embalm in Latin my philosophies.  
 Well seize your hour! But, ere you die, you'll sail  
 A British galleon to the golden courts  
 Of Cleopatra."

"Sail it!" Marlowe roared,  
 Mimicking in a fit of thunderous glee  
 The drums and trumpets of his Tamburlaine:  
 "And let her buccaneers bestride the sphinx,  
 And play at bowls with Pharaoh's pyramids,  
 And hale white Egypt with their tarry hands  
 Home to the Mermaid! Lift the good old song  
 That Rob Greene loved. Gods, how the lad would shout it!  
 Stand up and sing, John Davis!"

"Up!" called Raleigh,  
 "Lift the chanty of Black Bill's Honey-moon, Jack!  
 We'll keep the chorus going!"

"Silence, all!"  
 Ben Jonson echoed, rolling on his bench:  
 "This gentle lawyer hath a longing, lads,  
 To hear a right Homeric hymn. Now, Jack!  
 But wet your whistle, first! A cup of sack  
 For the first canto! Muscadel, the next!  
 Canary for the last!" I brought the cup.  
 John Davis emptied it at one mighty draught,  
 Leapt on a table, stamped with either foot,  
 And straight began to troll this mad sea-tale:

#### CANTO THE FIRST

Let Martin Parker at hawthorn-tide  
 Prattle in Devonshire lanes,  
 Let all his pedlar poets beside  
 Rattle their gallows-chains,  
 A tale like mine they never shall tell  
 Or a merrier ballad sing,  
 Till the Man in the Moon pipe up the tune  
 And the stars play Kiss-in-the-Ring!

*Chorus:* Till Philip of Spain in England reign,  
And the stars play Kiss-in-the-Ring!

All in the gorgeous dawn of day  
From grey old Plymouth Sound  
Our galleon crashed thro' the crimson spray  
To sail the world around:  
*Cloud i' the Sun* was her white-scrolled name,—  
There was never a lovelier lass  
For sailing in state after pieces of eight  
With her bombards all of brass.

*Chorus:* Culverins, robinets, iron may-be;  
But her bombards all of brass!

Now, they that go down to the sea in ships,  
Though piracy be their trade,  
For all that they pray not much with their lips  
They know where the storms are made:  
With the stars above and the sharks below,  
They need not parson or clerk;  
But our bo'sun Bill was an atheist still,  
Except—sometimes—in the dark!

*Chorus:* Now let Kit Marlowe mark!  
Our bo'sun Bill was an atheist still,  
Except—sometimes—in the dark!

All we adventured for, who shall say,  
Nor yet what our port might be?—  
A magical city of old Cathay,  
Or a castle of Muscovy,  
With our atheist bo'sun, Bill, Black Bill,  
Under the swinging Bear,  
Whistling at night for a seaman to light  
His little poop-lanthorns there.

*Chorus:* On the deep, in the night, for a seaman to light  
His little lost lanthorns there.

But, as over the Ocean-sea we swept,  
We chanced on a strange new land  
Where a valley of tall white lilies slept  
With a forest on either hand;  
A valley of white in a purple wood  
And, behind it, faint and far,  
Breathless and bright o'er the last rich height.  
Floated the sunset-star.

*Chorus:* Fair and bright o'er the rose-red height,  
Venus, the sunset-star.

"Twas a marvel to see, as we beached our boat,  
Black Bill, in that peach-bloom air,  
With the great white lilies that reached to his throat  
Like a stained-glass bo'sun there,  
And our little ship's chaplain, puffing and red,  
A-starn as we onward stole,  
With the disk of a lily behind his head  
Like a cherubin's aureole.

*Chorus:* He was round and red and behind his head  
He'd a cherubin's aureole.

"Hyrcania, land of honey and bees,  
We have found thee at last," he said,  
"Where the honey-comb swells in the hollow trees."  
(O, the lily behind his head!)  
"The honey-comb swells in the purple wood!  
'Tis the swette which the heavens distil,  
Saith Pliny himself, on my little book-shelf!  
Is the world not sweet to thee, Bill?"

*Chorus:* "Saith Pliny himself, on my little book-shelf!  
Is the world not sweet to thee, Bill?"

Now a man may taste of the devil's hot spice,  
And yet if his mind run back  
To the honey of childhood's Paradise  
His heart is not wholly black;

And Bill, Black Bill, from the days of his youth  
 Tho' his chest was broad as an oak,  
 Had cherished one innocent little sweet tooth,  
 And it itched as our chaplain spoke.

*Chorus:* He had kept one perilous little tooth,  
 And it itched as our chaplain spoke.

All around was a mutter of bees,  
 And Bill 'gan muttering too,—  
 "If the honey-comb swells in the hollow trees,  
 (What else can a Didymus do?)  
 I'll steer to the purple woods myself  
 And see if this thing be so,  
 Which the chaplain found on his little book-shelf,  
 For Pliny lived long ago."

*Chorus:* There's a platter of delf on his little book-shelf,  
 And Pliny lived long ago.

Scarce had he spoken when, out of the wood,  
 And buffeting all around,  
 Rooting our sea-boots where we stood,  
 There rumbled a marvellous sound,  
 As a mountain of honey were crumbling asunder,  
 Or a sunset-avalanche hurled  
 Honey-comb boulders of golden thunder  
 To smother the old black world.

*Chorus:* Honey-comb boulders of musical thunder  
 To mellow this old black world.

And the chaplain he whispered—"This honey,  
 one saith,  
 On my camphired cabin-shelf,  
 None may harvest on pain of death;  
 For the bee would eat it himself!  
 None walketh those woods but him whose voice  
 In the dingles you then did hear!"  
 "A VOICE?" growls Bill. "Ay, Bill, r-r-rejoice!  
 'Twas the great Hyreanian Bear!"

*Chorus:* Give thanks! Re-joice! 'Twas the glor-r-r-iouss  
 Voice  
 Of the great Hyrcanian Bear!

But, marking that Bill looked bitter indeed,  
 For his sweet tooth hungered sore,  
 "Consider," he saith, "that the Sweet hath need  
 Of the Sour, as the Sea of the Shore!  
 As the night to the day is our grief to our joy,  
 And each for its brother prepares  
 A banquet, Bill, that would otherwise cloy.  
 Thus is it with honey and bears."

*Chorus:* Roses and honey and laughter would cloy!  
 Give us thorns, too, and sorrow and bears!

"Consider," he saith, "how by fretting a string  
 The lutanist maketh sweet moan,  
 And a bird ere it fly must have air for its wing  
 To buffet or fall like a stone:  
 Tho' you blacken like Pluto you make but more whit.  
 These blooms which not Enna could yield!  
 Consider, Black Bill, ere the coming of night,  
 The lilies," he saith, "of the field."

*Chorus:* "Consider, Black Bill, in this beautiful light,  
 The lilies," he saith, "of the field."

"Consider the claws of a Bear," said Bill,  
 "That can rip off the flesh from your bones,  
 While his belly could cabin the skipper and still  
 Accommodate Timothy Jones!  
 Why, that's where a seaman who cares for his grog  
 Perspires how this world isn't square!  
 If there's *cause* for a *cow*, if there's *use* for a *don*,  
 By Pope John, there's no *Sense* in a *Bear!*"

*Chorus:* Cause for a cow, use for a dog,  
 By'r Lakin, no *Sense* in a *Bear!*

But our little ship's chaplain—"Sense," quoth he,  
 "Hath the Bear tho' his making have none;  
 For, my little book saith, by the sting of this bee  
 Would Ursus be wholly foredone,  
 But, or ever the hive he adventureth nigh  
 And its crisp gold-crusted dome,  
 He lardeth his nose and he greaseth his eye  
 With a piece of an honey-comb."

*Chorus:* His velvety nose and his sensitive eye  
 With a piece of an honey-comb.

Black Bill at the word of that golden crust  
 —For his ears had forgotten the roar,  
 And his eyes grew soft with their innocent lust—  
 'Gan licking his lips once more:  
 "Be it bound like a missal and printed as fair,  
 With capitals blue and red,  
 'Tis a lie; for what honey could comfort a bear,  
 Till the bear win the honey?" he said.

*Chorus:* "Ay, whence the first honey wherewith the first bear  
 First larded his nose?" he said.

"Thou first metaphysical bo'sun, Bill,"  
 Our chaplain quizzingly cried,  
 "Wilt thou riddle me redes of a dumpling still  
 With thy 'how came the apple inside'?"  
 "Nay," answered Bill, "but I quest for truth,  
 And I find it not on your shelf!  
 I will face your Hyrcanian bear, forsooth,  
 And look at his nose myself."

*Chorus:* For truth, for truth, or a little sweet tooth—  
 I will into the woods myself.

Breast-high thro' that foam-white ocean of bloom  
 With its wonderful spokes of gold,  
 Our sun-burnt crew in the rose-red gloom  
 Like buccaneer galleons rolled:

Breast-high, breast-high in the lilies we stood,  
 And before we could say "good-night,"  
 Out of the valley and into the wood  
 He plunged thro' the last rich light.

*Chorus:* Out of the lilies and into the wood,  
 Where the Great Bear walks all night!

And our little ship's chaplain he piped thro' the trees  
 As the moon rose, white and still,  
 "Hylas, return to thy Heracles!"  
 And we helped him with "Come back, Bill!"  
 Thrice he piped it, thrice we halloo'd,  
 And thrice we were dumb to hark;  
 But never an answer came from the wood,  
 So—we turned to our ship in the dark.

*Chorus:* Good-bye, Bill! you're a Didymus still;  
 But—you're all alone in the dark.

"This honey now"—as the first canto ceased,  
 The great young Bacon pompously began—  
 "Which Pliny calleth, as it were, the swette  
 Of heaven, or spettle of the stars, is found  
 In Muscovy. Now . . ." "Bring the muscadel,"  
 Ben Jonson roared—"Tis a more purple drink,  
 And suits with the next canto!"

At one draught

John Davis drained the cup, and with one hand  
 Beating the measure, rapidly trolled again.

#### CANTO THE SECOND

Now, Rabelais, art thou quite foredone,  
 Dan Chaucer, Drayton, Every One!  
 Leave we aboard our *Cloud i' the Sun*  
 This crew of pirates dreaming—  
 Of Angels, minted in the blue  
 Like golden moons, Rose-nobles, too,  
 As under the silver-sliding dew  
 Our emerald creek lay gleaming!

*Chorus:* Under the stars lay gleaming!

And mailed with scales of gold and green  
 The high star-lilied banks between,  
 Nosing our old black hulk unseen,  
 Great alligators shimmered:  
 Blood-red jaws i' the blue-black ooze,  
 Where all the long warm day they snooze,  
 Chewing old cuds of pirate-crews,  
 Around us grimly glimmered.

*Chorus:*      Their eyes like rubies glimmered.

Let us now sing of Bill, good sirs!  
 Follow him, all green forestéres,  
 Fearless of Hyrcanian bears  
 As of these ghostly lilies!  
 For O, not Drayton there could sing  
 Of wild Pigwiggen and his King  
 So merry a jest, so jolly a thing  
 As this my tale of Bill is.

*Chorus:*      Into the woods where Bill is!

Now starts he as a white owl hoots,  
 And now he stumbles over roots,  
 And now beneath his big sea-boots  
 In yon deep glade he crunches  
 Black cakes of honey-comb that were  
 So elfin-sweet, perchance, last year;  
 But neither Bo'sun, now, nor Bear  
 At that dark banquet munches.

*Chorus:*      Onward still he crunches!

Black cakes of honey-comb he sees  
 Above him in the forks of trees,  
 Filled by stars instead of bees,  
 With brimming silver glisten:  
 But ah, such food of gnome and fay  
 Could neither Bear nor Bill delay  
 Till where yon ferns and moonbeams play  
 He starts and stands to listen!

*Chorus:*      What melody doth he listen?

Is it the Night-Wind as it comes  
 Through the wood and softly thrums  
 Silvery tabors, purple drums,  
 To speed some wild-wood revel?  
 Nay, Didymus, what faint sweet din  
 Of viol and flute and violin  
 Makes all the forest round thee spin,  
 The Night-Wind or the Devil?

*Chorus:* No doubt at all—the Devil!

He stares, with naked knife in hand,  
 This buccaneer in fairyland!  
 Dancing in a saraband  
 The red ferns reel about him!  
 Dancing in a morrice-ring  
 The green ferns curtsey, kiss and cling!  
 Their Marians flirt, their Robins fling  
 Their feathery heels to flout him!

*Chorus:* The whole wood reels about him.

Dance, ye shadows! O'er the glade,  
 Bill, the Bo'sun, undismayed,  
 Pigeon-toes with glittering blade!  
 Drake was never bolder!  
 Devil or Spaniard, what cares he  
 Whence your eerie music be?  
 Till—lo, against yon old oak-tree  
 He leans his brawny shoulder!

*Chorus:* He lists and leans his shoulder!

Ah, what melody doth he hear  
 As to that gnarled old tree-trunk there  
 He lays his wind-bit brass-ringed ear,  
 And steals his arm about it?  
 What Dryad could this Bo'sun win  
 To that slow-rippling amorous grin?—  
 'Twas full of singing bees within!  
 Not Didymus could doubt it!

*Chorus:* So loud they buzzed about it!

Straight, o'er a bough one leg he throws,  
 And up that oaken main-mast goes  
 With reckless red unlarded nose  
     And gooseberry eyes of wonder!  
 Till now, as in a galleon's hold,  
 Below, he sees great cells of gold  
 Whence all the hollow trunk up-rolled  
     A low melodious thunder.

*Chorus:* A sweet and perilous thunder!

Ay, there, within that hollow tree,  
 Will Shakespeare, mightst thou truly see  
 The Imperial City of the Bee,  
     In Chrysomelan splendour!  
 And, in the midst, one eight-foot dome  
 Swells o'er that Titan honey-comb  
 Where the Bee-Empress hath her home,  
     With such as do attend her.

*Chorus:* Weaponed with stings attend her!

But now her singing sentinels  
 Have turned to sleep in waxen cells,  
 And Bill leans down his face and smells  
     The whole sweet summer's cargo—  
 In one deep breath, the whole year's bloom,  
 Lily and thyme and rose and broom,  
 One Golden Fleece of flower-perfume  
     In that old oaken Argo.

*Chorus:* That green and golden Argo!

And now he hangs with dangling feet  
 Over that dark abyss of sweet,  
 Striving to reach such wild gold meat  
     As none could buy for money:  
 His left hand grips a swinging branch  
 When—crack! Our Bo'sun, stout and stanch,  
 Falls like an Alpine avalanche,  
     Feet first into the honey!

*Chorus:* Up to his ears in honey!

And now his red unlarded nose  
And bulging eyes are all that shows  
Above it, as he puffs and blows!

And now—to 'scape the scathing  
Of that black host of furious bees  
His nose and eyes he fain would grease  
And bobs below those golden seas  
Like an old woman bathing.

*Chorus:* Old Mother Hubbard bathing!

And now he struggles, all in vain,  
To reach some little bough again;  
But, though he heaves with might and main,  
This honey holds his ribs, sirs,  
So tight, a barque might sooner try  
To steer a cargo through the sky  
Than Bill, thus honey-logged, to fly  
By flopping of his jib, sirs!

*Chorus:* His tops'l and his jib, sirs!

Like Oberon in the hive his beard  
With wax and honey all besmeared  
Would make the crescent moon afeard

That now is sailing brightly  
Right o'er his leafy donjon-keep!  
But that she knows him sunken deep,  
And that his tower is straight and steep,  
She would not smile so lightly.

*Chorus:* Look down and smile so lightly.

She smiles in that small heavenly space,  
Ringed with the tree-trunk's leafy grace,  
While upward grins his ghastly face

As if some wild-wood Satyr,  
Some gnomish Ptolemy should dare  
Up that dark optic tube to stare,  
As all unveiled she floated there,  
Poor maiden moon, straight at her!

*Chorus:* The buccaneering Satyr!

But there, till some one help him out,  
 Black Bill must stay, without a doubt.  
 "Help! Help!" he gives a muffled shout!  
 None but the white owls hear it!  
*Who? Whoo?* they cry: Bill answers "Me!  
*I am stuck fast in this great tree!*  
*Bring me a rope, good Timothy!*  
*There's honey, lads, we'll share it!"*

*Chorus:* Ay, now he wants to share it.

Then, thinking help may come with morn.  
 He sinks, half-famished and out-worn,  
 And scarce his nose exalts its horn  
 Above that sea of glory!  
 But, even as he owns defeat,  
 His belly saith, "A man must eat,  
 And since there is none other meat,  
 Come, lap this mess before 'ee!"

*Chorus:* This glorious mess before 'ee.

Then Dian sees a right strange sight  
 As, bidding him a fond good-night,  
 She flings a silvery kiss to light  
 In that deep oak-tree hollow,  
 And finds that gold and crimson nose  
 A moving, munching, ravenous rose  
 That up and down unceasing goes,  
 Save when he stops to swallow!

*Chorus:* He finds it hard to swallow!

Ay, now his best becomes his worst,  
 For honey cannot quench his thirst,  
 Though he should eat until he burst;  
 But, ah, the skies are kindly,  
 And from their tender depths of blue  
 They send their silver-sliding dew.  
 So Bill thrusts out his tongue anew  
 And waits to catch it—blindly!

*Chorus:* For ah, the stars are kindly!

And sometimes, with a shower of rain,  
 They strive to ease their prisoner's pain:  
 Then Bill thrusts out his tongue again  
     With never a grace, the sinner!  
 And day and night and day goes by,  
 And never a comrade comes anigh,  
 And still the honey swells as high  
     For supper, breakfast, dinner!

*Chorus:* Yet Bill has grown no thinner!

The young moon grows to full and throws  
 Her buxom kiss upon his nose,  
 As nightly over the tree she goes,  
     And peeps and smiles and passes,  
 Then with her fickle silver flecks  
 Our old black galleon's dreaming decks;  
 And then her face, with nods and becks,  
     In midmost ocean glasses.

*Chorus:* 'Twas ever the way with lasses!

Ah, Didymus, hast thou won indeed  
 That Paradise which is thy meed?  
 (Thy tale not all that run may read!)  
     Thy sweet hath now no leaven!  
 Now, like an onion in a cup  
 Of mead, thou liest for Jove to sup,  
 Could Polyphemus lift thee up  
     With Titan hands to heaven!

*Chorus:* This great oak-cup to heaven!

The second canto ceased; and, as they raised  
 Their wine-cups with the last triumphant note,  
 Bacon, undaunted, raised his grating voice—  
 “This honey which, in some sort, may be styled  
 The Spettle of the Stars . . .” “Bring the Canary!”  
 Ben Jonson roared. “It is a moral wine  
 And suits the third, last canto!” At one draught  
 John Davis drained it and began anew.

## CANTO THE THIRD

A month went by. We were hoisting sail!  
 We had lost all hope of Bill;  
 Though, laugh as you may at a seaman's tale,  
     He was fast in his honey-comb still!  
 And often he thinks of the chaplain's word  
     In the days he shall see no more,—  
 How the Sweet, indeed, of the Sour hath need;  
     And the Sea, likewise, of the Shore.

- Chorus:* The chaplain's word of the Air and a Bird;  
     Of the Sea, likewise, and the Shore!
- "O, had I the wings of a dove, I would fly  
     To a heaven, of aloes and gall!  
 I have honeyed," he yammers, "my nose and mine  
     eye,  
     And the bees cannot sting me at all!  
 And it's O, for the sting of a little brown bee,  
     Or to blister my hands on a rope,  
 Or to buffet a thundering broad-side sea  
     On a deck like a mountain-slope!"
- Chorus:* With her mast snapt short, and a list to port  
     And a deck like a mountain-slope.

But alas, and he thinks of the chaplain's voice  
     When that roar from the woods out-break—  
*R-r-re-joice! R-r-re-joice!* "Now, wherefore rejoice  
     In the music a bear could make?  
 'Tis a judgment, maybe, that I stick in this tree;  
     Yet in this I out-argued him fair!  
 Though I live, though I die, in this honey-comb pie,  
     By Pope Joan, there's no sense in a bear!"

- Chorus:* Notes in a nightingale, plums in a pie,  
     By'r Lakin, no *Sense* in a *Bear*!
- He knew not our anchor was heaved from the mud:  
     He was growling it over again,  
 When—a strange sound suddenly froze his blood,  
     And curdled his big slow brain!—

A marvellous sound, as of great steel claws  
Gripping the bark of his tree,  
Softly ascended! Like lightning ended  
His honey-comb reverie!

*Chorus:* The honey-comb quivered! The little leaves  
shivered!  
*Something was climbing the tree!*

Something that breathed like a fat sea-cook,  
Or a pirate of fourteen ton!  
But it clomb like a cat (tho' the whole tree shook)  
Stealthily tow'rds the sun,  
Till, as Black Bill gapes at the little blue ring  
Overhead, which he calls the sky,  
It is clean blotted out by a monstrous Thing  
Which—*hath larded its nose and its eye.*

*Chorus:* O, well for thee, Bill, that this monstrous Thing  
Hath blinkered its little red eye.

Still as a mouse lies Bill with his face  
Low down in the dark sweet gold,  
While this monster turns round in the leaf-fringed  
space!  
Then—taking a good firm hold,  
As the skipper descending the cabin-stair,  
Tail-first with a vast slow tread,  
Solemnly, softly, cometh this Bear  
Straight down o'er the Bo'sun's head.

*Chorus:* Solemnly—slowly—cometh this Bear,  
Tail-first o'er the Bo'sun's head.

Nearer—nearer—then all Bill's breath  
Out-bursts in one leap and yell!  
And this Bear thinks, "Now am I gripped from  
beneath  
By a roaring devil from hell!"  
And madly Bill clutches his brown bow-legs,  
And madly this Bear doth hale,  
With his little red eyes fear-mad for the skies  
And Bill's teeth fast in his tail!

*Chorus:* Small wonder a Bear should quail!  
 To have larded his nose, to have greased his eyes,  
 And be stung at the last in his tail.

Pull, Bo'sun! Pull, Bear! In the hot sweet gloom,  
 Pull Bruin, pull Bill, for the skies!  
 Pull—out of their gold with a bombard's boom  
 Come Black Bill's honeyed thighs!  
 Pull! Up! Up! Up! with a scuffle and scramble,  
 To that little blue ring of bliss,  
 This Bear doth go with our Bo'sun in tow  
 Stinging his tail, I wis.

*Chorus:* And this Bear thinks—"Many great bees I know,  
 But there never was Bee like this!"

All in the gorgeous death of day  
 We had slipped from our emerald creek,  
 And our *Cloud i' the Sun* was careening away  
 With the old gay flag at the peak,  
 When, suddenly, out of the purple wood,  
 Breast-high thro' the lilies there danced  
 A tall lean figure, black as a nigger,  
 That shouted and waved and pranced!

*Chorus:* A gold-greased figure, but black as a nigger,  
 Waving his shirt as he pranced!

"'Tis Hylas! 'Tis Hylas!" our chaplain flutes,  
 And our skipper he looses a shout!  
 "'Tis Bill! Black Bill, in his old sea-boots!  
*Stand by to bring her about!*  
*Har-r-rd a-starboard!"* And round we came,  
 With a lurch and a dip and a roll,  
 And a banging boom thro' the rose-red gloom  
 For our old Black Bo'sun's soul!

*Chorus:* Alive! Not dead! Tho' behind his head  
 He'd a seraphin's aureole!

And our chaplain he sniffs, as Bill finished his tale,  
(With the honey still scenting his hair!)  
O'er a plate of salt beef and a mug of old ale—  
“By Pope Joan, there's no sense in a bear!”  
And we laughed, but our Bo'sun he solemnly growls  
—“Till the sails of yon heavens be furled,  
It taketh—now, mark!—all the beasts in the Ark,  
Teeth and claws, too, to make a good world!”

*Chorus:* Till the great—blue—sails—be—furled,  
It taketh—now, mark!—all the beasts in the Ark,  
Teeth and claws, too, to make a good world!

“Sack! Sack! Canary! Malmsey! Muscadel!”—  
As the last canto ceased, the Mermaid Inn  
Chorussed. I flew from laughing voice to voice;  
But, over all the hubbub, rose the drone  
Of Francis Bacon,—“Now, this Muscovy  
Is a cold clime, not favourable to bees  
(Or love, which is a weakness of the south)  
As well might be supposed. Yet, as hot lands  
Gender hot fruits and odiferous spice,  
In this case we may think that honey and flowers  
Are comparable with the light airs of May  
And a more temperate region. Also we see,  
As Pliny saith, this honey being a sweete  
Of heaven, a certain spettle of the stars,  
Which, gathering unclean vapours as it falls,  
Hangs as a fat dew on the boughs, the bees  
Obtain it partly thus, and afterwards  
Corrupt it in their stomachs, and at last—  
Expel it through their mouths and harvest it  
In hives; yet, of its heavenly source it keeps  
A great part. Thus, by various principles  
Of natural philosophy we observe—”  
And, as he leaned to Drayton, droning thus,  
I saw a light gleam of celestial mirth  
Flit o'er the face of Shakespeare—scarce a smile—  
A swift irradiation from within  
As of a cloud that softly veils the sun.

## IV

## THE SIGN OF THE GOLDEN SHOE

We had just set our brazier smouldering,  
To keep the Plague away. Many a house  
Was marked with the red cross. The bells tolled  
Incessantly. Nash crept into the room  
Shivering like a fragment of the night,  
His face yellow as parchment, and his eyes  
Burning.

"The Plague! He has taken it!" voices cried.  
"That's not the Plague! The old carrion-crow is drunk;  
But stand away. What ails you, Nash my lad?"  
Then, through the clamour, as through a storm at sea,  
The master's voice, the voice of Ben, rang out,  
"Nash!"

Ben leapt to his feet, and like a ship  
Shouldering the waves, he shouldered the throng aside.  
"What ails you, man? What's that upon your breast?  
Blood?"

"Marlowe is dead," said Nash,  
And stunned the room to silence . . .

"Marlowe—dead!"  
Ben caught him by the shoulders. "Nash! Awake!  
What do you mean? Marlowe? Kit Marlowe? Dead?  
I supped with him—why—not three nights ago!  
You are drunk! You are dazed! There's blood upon your  
coat!"

"That's—where he died," said Nash, and suddenly sank  
Sidelong across a bench, bowing his head  
Between his hands . . .

Wept, I believe. Then, like a whip of steel,  
His lean black figure sprang erect again.

"Marlowe!" he cried, "Kit Marlowe, killed for a punk,  
A taffeta petticoat! Killed by an apple-squire!  
Drunk! I was drunk; but I am sober now,  
Sober enough, by God! Poor Kit is dead."

The Mermaid Inn was thronged for many a night  
With startled faces. Voices rose and fell,  
As I recall them, in a great vague dream,  
Curious, pitiful, angry, thrashing out  
The tragic truth. Then, all along the Cheape,  
The ballad-mongers waved their sheets of rhyme,  
Croaking: *Come buy! Come buy! The bloody death  
Of Wormall, writ by Master Richard Bame!*  
*Come buy! Come buy! The Atheist's Tragedy.*  
And, even in Bread Street, at our very door,  
The crowder to his cracked old fiddle sang:—

*"He was a poet of proud repute  
And wrote full many a play,  
Now strutting in a silken suit,  
Now begging by the way."*

Then, out of the hubbub and the clash of tongues,  
The bawdy tales and scraps of balladry,  
(As out of chaos rose the slow round world)  
At last, though for the Mermaid Inn alone,  
Emerged some tragic semblance of a soul,  
Some semblance of the rounded truth, a world  
Glimpsed only through great mists of blood and tears,  
Yet smitten, here and there, with dreadful light,  
As I believe, from heaven.

Strangely enough,  
(Though Ben forgot his pipe and Will's deep eyes  
Deepened and softened, when they spoke of Kit,  
For many a month thereafter) it was Nash  
That took the blow like steel into his heart.  
Nash, our "Piers Penniless," whom Rob Greene had called  
"Young Juvenal," the first satirist of our age,  
Nash, of the biting tongue and subtle sneer,  
Brooded upon it, till his grief became  
Sharp as a rapier, ready to lunge in hate  
At all the lies of shallower hearts.

One night,  
The night he raised the mists from that wild world,  
He talked with Chapman in the Mermaid Inn  
Of Marlowe's poem that was left half-sung,  
His *Hero and Leander*.

"Kit desired,  
If he died first, that you should finish it,"  
Said Nash.

A loaded silence filled the room  
As with the imminent spirit of the dead  
Listening. And long that picture haunted me:  
Nash, like a lithe young Mephistopheles  
Leaning between the silver candle-sticks,  
Across the oak table, with his keen white face,  
Dark smouldering eyes, and black, dishevelled hair;  
Chapman, with something of the steady strength  
That helms our ships, and something of the Greek,  
The cool clear passion of Platonic thought  
Behind the fringe of his Olympian beard  
And broad Homeric brows, confronting him  
Gravely.

There was a burden of mystery  
Brooding on all that night; and, when at last  
Chapman replied, I knew he felt it, too.  
The curious pedantry of his wonted speech  
Was charged with living undertones, like truths  
Too strange and too tremendous to be breathed  
Save thro' a mask. And though, in lines that flamed  
Once with strange rivalry, Shakespeare himself defied  
Chapman, that spirit "by spirits taught to write  
Above a mortal pitch," Will's nimbler sense  
Was quick to breathings from beyond our world  
And could not hold them lightly.

"Ah, then Kit,"  
Said Chapman, "had some prescience of his end,  
Like many another dreamer. What strange hints  
Of things past, present, and to come, there lie  
Sealed in the magic pages of that music  
Which, laying strong hold on universal laws,  
Ranges beyond these mud-walls of the flesh,  
Though dull wits fail to follow. It was this  
That made men find an oracle in the books  
Of Vergil, and an everlasting fount  
Of science in the prophets."

Once again  
That haunted silence filled the shadowy room;

And, far away up Bread Street, we could hear  
The crowder, piping of black Wormall still:—

*"He had a friend, once gay and green,  
Who died of want alone,  
In whose black fate he might have seen  
The warning of his own."*

"Strange he should ask a hod-man like myself  
To crown that miracle of his April age," . . .  
Said Chapman, murmuring softly under breath,  
*"Amorous Leander, beautiful and young . . .*  
Why, Nash, had I been only charged to raise  
Out of its grave in the green Hellespont  
The body of that boy,  
To make him sparkle and leap thro' the cold waves  
And fold young Hero to his heart again,  
The task were scarce as hard.

But . . . stranger still,"—

And his next words, although I hardly knew  
All that he meant, went tingling through my flesh—  
"Before you spoke, before I knew his wish,  
I had begun to write!

I knew and loved  
His work. Himself I hardly knew at all;  
And yet—I know him now! I have heard him now  
And, since he pledged me in so rare a cup,  
I'll lift and drink to him, though lightnings fall  
From envious gods to scourge me. I will lift  
This cup in darkness to the soul that reigns  
In light on Helicon. Who knows how near?  
For I have thought, sometimes, when I have tried  
To work his will, the hand that moved my pen  
Was mine, and yet—not mine. The bodily mask  
Is mine, and sometimes, dull as clay, it sleeps  
With old Musæus. Then strange flashes come,  
Oracular glories, visionary gleams,  
And the mask moves, not of itself, and sings."

"I know that thought," said Nash. "A mighty ship,  
A lightning-shattered wreck, out in that night,  
Unseen, has foundered thundering. We sit here

Snug on the shore, and feel the wash of it,  
The widening circles running to our feet.  
Can such a soul go down to glut the sharks  
Without one ripple? Here comes one sprinkle of spray.  
Listen!" And through that night, quick and intense,  
And hushed for thunder, tingled once again,  
Like a thin wire, the crowder's distant tune:—

*"Had he been prenticed to the trade  
His father followed still,  
This exit he had never made,  
Nor played a part so ill."*

"Here is another," said Nash, "I know not why;  
But like a weed in the long wash, I too  
Was moved, not of myself, to a tune like this.  
O, I can play the crowder, fiddle a song  
On a dead friend, with any the best of you.  
Lie and kick heels in the sun on a dead man's grave  
And yet—God knows—it is the best we can;  
And better than the world's way, to forget."  
So saying, like one that murmurs happy words  
To torture his own grief, half in self-scorn,  
He breathed a scrap of balladry that raised  
The mists a moment from that Paradise,  
That primal world of innocence, where Kit  
In childhood played, outside his father's shop,  
Under the sign of the *Golden Shoe*, as thus:—

A cobbler lived in Canterbury  
—He is dead now, poor soul!—  
He sat at his door and stitched in the sun,  
Nodding and smiling at everyone;  
For St. Hugh makes all good cobblers merry,  
And often he sang as the pilgrims passed,  
"I can hammer a soldier's boot,  
And daintily glove a dainty foot.  
Many a sandal from my hand  
Has walked the road to Holy Land.  
Knights may fight for me, priests may pray for me,  
Pilgrims walk the pilgrim's way for me,

I have a work in the world to do!  
—*Trowl the bowl, the nut-brown bowl,*  
    *To good St. Hugh!*—  
The cobbler must stick to his last.”

And anon he would cry  
“Kit! Kit! Kit!” to his little son,  
“Look at the pilgrims riding by!  
Dance down, hop down, after them, run!”  
Then, like an unfledged linnet, out  
Would tumble the brave little lad,  
With a piping shout,—  
“O, look at them, look at them, look at them, Dad!  
Priest and prioress, abbot and friar,  
Soldier and seaman, knight and squire!  
How many countries have they seen?  
Is there a king there, is there a queen?  
Dad, one day,  
Thou and I must ride like this,  
All along the Pilgrim’s Way,  
By Glastonbury and Samarcand,  
El Dorado and Cathay,  
London and Persepolis,  
All the way to Holy Land!”

Then, shaking his head as if he knew,  
Under the sign of the *Golden Shoe*,  
Touched by the glow of the setting sun,  
While the pilgrims passed,  
The little cobbler would laugh and say:  
“When you are old you will understand  
’Tis a very long way  
To Samarcand!  
Why, largely to exaggerate  
Befits not men of small estate,  
But—I should say, yes, I should say,  
’Tis a hundred miles from where you stand;  
And a hundred more, my little son,  
A hundred more, to Holy Land! . . .

I have a work in the world to do  
 —*Trowl the bowl, the nut-brown bowl,*  
*To good St. Hugh!—*  
 The cobbler must stick to his last."

"Which last," said Nash, breaking his rhyme off short,  
 "The crowder, after his kind, would seem to approve.  
 Well—all the waves from that great wreck out there  
 Break, and are lost in one withdrawing sigh:

The little lad that used to play  
 Around the cobbler's door,  
 Kit Marlowe, Kit Marlowe,  
 We shall not see him more.

But—could I tell you how that galleon sank,  
 Could I but bring you to that hollow whirl,  
 The black gulf in mid-ocean, where that wreck  
 Went thundering down, and round it hell still roars,  
 That were a tale to snap all fiddle-strings."  
 "Tell me," said Chapman.

"Ah, you wondered why,"  
 Said Nash, "you wondered why he asked your help  
 To crown that work of his. Why, Chapman, think,  
 Think of the cobbler's awl—there's a stout lance  
 To couch at London, there's a conquering point  
 To carry in triumph through Persepolis!  
 I tell you Kit was nothing but a child,  
 When some rich patron of the *Golden Shoe*  
 Beheld him riding into Samarcand  
 Upon a broken chair, the which he said  
 Was a white steed, splashed with the blood of kings.

When, on that patron's bounty, he did ride  
 So far as Cambridge, he was a brave lad,  
 Untamed, adventurous, but still innocent,  
 O, innocent as the cobbler's little self!  
 He brought to London just a bundle and stick,  
 A slender purse, an Ovid, a few scraps  
 Of song, and all unshielded, all unarmed  
 A child's heart, packed with splendid hopes and dreams.  
 I say a child's heart, Chapman, and that phrase  
 Crowns, not dis-crowns, his manhood.

Well—he turned

An honest penny, taking some small part  
In plays at the *Red Bull*. And, all the while,  
Beyond the paint and tinsel of the stage,  
Beyond the greasy cock-pit with its reek  
Of orange-peel and civet, as all of these  
Were but the clay churned by the glorious rush  
Of his white chariots and his burning steeds,  
Nay, as the clay were a shadow, his great dreams,  
Like bannered legions on some proud crusade,  
Empurpling all the deserts of the world,  
Swept on in triumph to the glittering towers  
Of his abiding City.

Then—he met

That damned blood-sucking cockatrice, the pug  
Of some fine strutting mummer, one of those plagues  
Bred by our stage, a puff-ball on the hill  
Of Helicon. As for his wench—she too  
Had played so many parts that she forgot  
The cue for truth. King Puff had taught her well.  
He was the vainer and more foolish thing,  
She the more poisonous.

One dark day, to spite

Archer, her latest paramour, a friend  
And apple-squire to Puff, she set her eyes  
On Marlowe . . . feigned a joy in his young art,  
Murmured his songs, used all her London tricks  
To coney-catch the country greenhorn. Man,  
Kit never even *saw* her painted face!  
He pored on books by candle-light and saw  
Everything thro' a mist. O, I could laugh  
To think of it, only—his up-turned skull  
There, in the dark, now that the flesh drops off,  
Has laughed enough, a horrible silent laugh,  
To think his Angel of Light was, after all,  
Only the red-lipped Angel of the Plague.  
He was no better than the rest of us,  
No worse. He felt the heat. He felt the cold.  
He took her down to Deptford to escape  
Contagion, and the crashing of sextons' spades  
On dead men's bones in every churchyard round;

The jangling bell and the cry, *Bring out your dead.*  
 And there she told him of her luckless life,  
 Wedded, deserted, both against her will,  
 A luckless Eve that never knew the snake.  
 True and half-true she mixed in one wild lie,  
 And then—she caught him by the hand and wept.  
 No death-cart passed to warn him with its bell.  
 Her eyes, her perfumed hair, and her red mouth.  
 Her warm white breast, her civet-scented skin,  
 Swimming before him, in a piteous mist,  
 Made the lad drunk, and—she was in his arms;  
 And all that God had meant to wake one day  
 Under the Sun of Love, suddenly woke  
 By candle-light and cried, ‘The Sun; The Sun!’  
 And he believed it, Chapman, he believed it!  
 He was a cobbler’s son, and he believed  
 In Love! Blind, through that mist, he caught at Love,  
 The everlasting King of all this world.

Kit was not clever. Clever men—like Pomp—  
 Might jest. And fools might laugh. But when a man,  
 Simple as all great elemental things,  
 Makes his whole heart a sacrificial fire  
 To one whose love is in her supple skin,  
 There comes a laughter in which jests break up  
 Like icebergs in a sea of burning marl.  
 Then dreamers turn to murderers in an hour.  
 Then topless towers are burnt, and the Ocean-sea  
 Tramples the proud fleet, down, into the dark,  
 And sweeps over it, laughing. Come and see,  
 The heart now of this darkness—no more waves,  
 But the black central hollow where that wreck  
 Went down for ever.

How should Piers Penniless  
 Brand that wild picture on the world’s black heart?—  
 Last night I tried the way of the Florentine,  
 And bruised myself; but we are friends together  
 Mourning a dead friend, none will ever know!—  
 Kit, do you smile at poor Piers Penniless,  
 Measuring it out? Ah, boy, it is my best!  
 Since hearts must beat, let it be *terza rima*,

A ladder of rhyme that two sad friends alone  
May let down, thus, to the last circle of hell."

So saying, and motionless as a man in trance,  
Nash breathed the words that raised the veil anew,  
Strange intervolving words which, as he spake them,  
Moved like the huge slow whirlpool of that pit  
Where the wreck sank, the serpentine slow folds  
Of the lewd Kraken that sucked it, shuddering, down:—

This is the Deptford Inn. Climb the dark stair.

Come, come and see Kit Marlowe lying dead!  
See, on the table, by that broken chair,

The little phials of paint—the white and red.

A cut-lawn kerchief hangs behind the door,  
Left by his punk, even as the tapster said.

There is the gold-fringed taffeta gown she wore,

And, on that wine-stained bed, as is most meet,  
He lies alone, never to waken more.

O, still as chiselled marble, the frayed sheet

Folds the still form on that sepulchral bed,  
Hides the dead face, and peaks the rigid feet.

Come, come and see Kit Marlowe lying dead!

Draw back the sheet, ah, tenderly lay bare  
The splendour of that Apollonian head;

The gloriole of his flame-coloured hair;

The lean athletic body, deftly planned  
To carry that swift soul of fire and air;

The long thin flanks, the broad breast, and the grand

Heroic shoulders! Look, what lost dreams lie  
Cold in the fingers of that delicate hand;

And, shut within those lyric lips, what cry

Of unborn beauty, sunk in utter night,  
Lost worlds of song, sealed in an unknown sky,

Never to be brought forth, clothed on with light.  
Was this, then, this the secret of his song?—  
*Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?*

It was not Love, not Love, that wrought this wrong;  
And yet—what evil shadow of this dark town  
Could quench a soul so flame-like clean and strong,

Strike the young glory of his manhood down,  
Dead, like a dog, dead in a drunken brawl,  
Dead for a phial of paint, a taffeta gown?

What if his blood were hot? High over all  
He heard, as in his song the world still hears,  
Those angels on the burning heavenly wall

Who chant the thunder-music of the spheres.  
Yet—through the glory of his own young dream  
Here did he meet that face, wet with strange tears,

Andromeda, with piteous face astream,  
Hailing him, Perseus. In her treacherous eyes  
As in dark pools the mirrored stars will gleam,

Here did he see his own eternal skies;  
And here—she laughed, nor found the dream amiss;  
But bade him pluck and eat—in Paradise.

Here did she hold him, broken up with bliss,  
Here, like a supple snake, around him coiled,  
Here did she pluck his heart out with a kiss,

Here were the wings clipped and the glory soiled,  
Here adders coupled in the pure white shrine,  
Here was the Wine spilt, and the Shew-bread spoiled.

Black was that feast, though he who poured the Wine  
Dreamed that he poured it in high sacrament.  
Deep in her eyes he saw his own eyes shine,

Beheld Love's god-head and was well content.

Subtly her hand struck the pure silver note,  
The throbbing chord of passion that God meant

To swell the bliss of heaven. Round his young throat

She wound her swarthy tresses; then, with eyes  
Half mad to see their power, half mad to gloat,

Half mad to batten on their own devilries,

And mark what heaven-born splendours they could quell,  
She held him quivering in a mesh of lies,

And in soft broken speech began to tell—

There as, against her heart, throbbing he lay—  
The truth that hurled his soul from heaven to hell.

Quivering, she watched the subtle whip-lash flay

The white flesh of the dreams of his pure youth;  
Then sucked the blood and left them cold as clay.

Luxuriously she lashed him with the truth.

Against his mouth her subtle mouth she set  
To show, as through a mask, O, without ruth,

As through a cold clay mask (brackish and wet

With what strange tears!) it was not his, not his,  
The kiss that through his quivering lips she met.

Kissing him, "Thus," she whispered, "did he kiss.

Ah, is the sweetness like a sword, then, sweet?  
Last night—ah, kiss again—aching with bliss,

*Thus was I made his own, from head to feet."*

—A sudden agony thro' his body swept  
Tempestuously.—"Our wedded pulses beat

*Like this and this; and then, at dawn, he slept."*

She laughed, pouting her lips against his cheek  
To drink; and, as in answer, Marlowe wept.

As a dead man in dreams, he heard her speak.

Clasped in the bitter grave of that sweet clay,  
Wedded and one with it, he moaned. Too weak

Even to lift his head, sobbing, he lay.

Then, slowly, as their breathings rose and fell,  
He felt the storm of passion, far away,

Gather. The shuddering waves began to swell.

And, through the menace of the thunder-roll,  
The thin quick lightnings, thrilling through his hell,

Lightnings that hell itself could not control

(Even while she strove to bow his neck anew)  
Woke the great slumbering legions of his soul.

Sharp was that severance of the false and true,

Sharp as a sword drawn from a shuddering wound,  
But they, that were one flesh, were cloven in two.

Flesh leapt from clasping flesh, without a sound.

He plucked his body from her white embrace,  
And cast him down, and grovelled on the ground.

Yet, ere he went, he strove once more to trace,

Deep in her eyes, the loveliness he knew;  
Then—spat his hatred into her smiling face.

She clung to him. He flung her off. He drew

His dagger, thumbed the blade, and laughed—"Poor punk!  
What? Would you make me your own murderer, too?"

"That was the day of our great feast," said Nash,  
"Aboard the *Golden Hynde*. The grand old hulk  
Was drawn up for the citizens' wonderment  
At Deptford. Ay, Piers Penniless was there!  
Soaked and besotted as I was, I saw  
Everything. On her poop the minstrels played,  
And round her sea-worn keel, like meadow-sweet  
Curtseying round a lightning-blackened oak,

Prentices and their sweethearts, heel and toe,  
Danced the brave English dances, clean and fresh  
As May.

But in her broad gun-guarded waist  
Once red with British blood, long tables groaned  
For revellers not so worthy. Where her guns  
Had raked the seas, barrels of ale were sprung,  
Bestrid by roaring tipplers. Where at night  
The storm-beat crew silently bowed their heads  
With Drake before the King of Life and Death,  
A strumpet wrestled with a mountebank  
For pence, a loose-limbed Lais with a clown  
Of Cherry Hilton. Leering at their lewd twists,  
Cross-legged upon the deck, sluggish with sack,  
Like a squat toad sat Puff . . .  
Propped up against the bulwarks, at his side,  
Archer, his apple-squire, hiccupped a bawdy song.

Suddenly, through that orgy, with wild eyes,  
Yet with her customary smile, O, there  
I saw in daylight what Kit Marlowe saw  
Through blinding mists, the face of his first love.  
She stood before her paramour on the deck,  
Cocking her painted head to right and left,  
Her white teeth smiling, but her voice a hiss:  
'Quickly,' she said to Archer, 'come away,  
Or there'll be blood spilt!'

'Better blood than wine,'  
Said Archer, struggling to his feet, 'but who,  
Who would spill blood?'

'Marlowe!' she said.

Then Puff  
Reeled to his feet. 'What, Kit, the cobbler's son?  
The lad that broke his leg at the *Red Bull*,  
Tamburlaine-Marlowe, he that would chain kings  
To's chariot-wheel? What, is he rushing hither?  
He would spill blood for Gloriana, hey?  
O, my Belphœbe, you will crack my sides!  
Was this the wench that shipped a thousand squires?  
O, ho! But here he comes. Now, solemnly, lads,—  
*Now walk the angels on the walls of heaven*  
*To entertain divine Zenocrate!*'

And there stood Kit, high on the storm-scarred poop,  
 Against the sky, bare-headed. I saw his face,  
 Pale, innocent, just the clear face of that boy  
 Who walked to Cambridge with a bundle and stick,—  
 The little cobbler's son. Yet—there I caught  
 My only glimpse of how the sun-god looked,  
 And only for one moment.

When he saw

His mistress, his face whitened, and he shook.  
 Down to the deck he came, a poor weak man;  
 And yet—by God—the only man that day  
 In all our drunken crew.

‘Come along, Kit,’  
 Cried Puff, ‘we'll all be friends now, all take hands,  
 And dance—ha! ha!—the shaking of the sheets!’  
 Then Archer, shuffling a step, raised his cracked voice  
 In Kit's own song to a falsetto tune,  
 Snapping one hand, thus, over his head as he danced:—

*‘Come, live with me, and be my love,  
 And we will all the pleasures prove!’ . . .*

Puff reeled between, laughing. ‘Damn you,’ cried Kit,  
 And, catching the fat swine by his round soft throat,  
 Hurled him headlong, crashing across the tables,  
 To lie and groan in the red bilge of wine  
 That washed the scuppers.

Kit gave him not one glance.  
 ‘Archer,’ he said in a whisper.

Instantly  
 A long thin rapier flashed in Archer's hand.  
 The ship was one wild uproar. Women screamed  
 And huddled together. A drunken clamorous ring  
 Seethed around Marlowe and his enemy.  
 Kit drew his dagger, slowly, and I knew  
 Blood would be spilt.

‘Here, take my rapier, Kit!’  
 I cried across the crowd, seeing the lad  
 Was armed so slightly. But he did not hear.  
 I could not reach him.

All at once he leapt  
Like a wounded tiger, past the rapier point  
Straight at his enemy's throat. I saw his hand  
Up-raised to strike! I heard a harlot's scream,  
And, in mid-air, the hand stayed, quivering, white,  
A frozen menace.

I saw a yellow claw  
Twisting the dagger out of that frozen hand;  
I saw his own steel in that yellow grip,  
His own lost lightning raised to strike at him!  
I saw it flash! I heard the driving grunt  
Of him that struck! Then, with a shout, the crowd  
Sundered, and through the gap, a blank red thing  
Streaming with blood came the blind face of Kit,  
Reeling, to me! And I, poor drunken I,  
Held my arms wide for him. Here, on my breast,  
With one great sob, he burst his heart and died."

Nash ceased. And, far away down Friday Street,  
The crowder with his fiddler wailed again:

*"Blaspheming Tambolin must die  
And Faustus meet his end.  
Repent, repent, or presentlie  
To hell ye must descend."*

And, as in answer, Chapman slowly breathed  
Those mightiest lines of Marlowe's own despair:

*"Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells?"*

"Ah, you have said it," said Nash, "and there you know  
Why Kit desired your hand to crown his work.  
He reverenced you as one whose temperate eyes  
Austere and grave, could look him through and through;  
One whose firm hand could grasp the reins of law  
And guide those furious horses of the sun,  
As Ben and Will can guide them, where you will.  
His were, perchance, the noblest steeds of all,

And from their nostrils blew a fierier dawn  
Above the world. That glory is his own;  
But where he fell, he fell. Before his hand  
Had learned to quell them, he was dashed to the earth.  
'Tis yours to show that good men honoured him.  
For, mark this, Chapman, since Kit Marlowe fell,  
There will be fools that, in the name of Art,  
Will wallow in the mire, crying 'I fall,  
I fall from heaven!'—fools that have only heard  
From earth, the rumour of those golden hooves  
Far, far above them. Yes, you know the kind,  
The fools that scorn Will for his lack of fire  
Because he quells the storms they never knew,  
And rides above the thunder; fools of Art  
That skip and vex, like little vicious fleas,  
Their only Helicon, some green madam's breast.  
Art! Art! O, God, that I could send my soul,  
In one last wave, from that night-hidden wreck,  
Across the shores of all the years to be;  
O, God, that like a crowder I might shake  
Their blind dark casements with the pity of it,  
Piers Penniless his ballad, a poor scrap,  
That but for lack of time, and hope and pence,  
He might have bettered! For a dead man's sake,  
Thus would the wave break, thus the crowder cry:—

Dead, like a dog upon the road;  
Dead, for a harlot's kiss;  
The Apollonian throat and brow,  
The lyric lips, so silent now,  
The flaming wings that heaven bestowed  
For loftier airs than this!

The sun-like eyes whose light and life  
Had gazed an angel's down,  
That burning heart of honey and fire,  
Quenched and dead for an apple-squire,  
Quenched at the thrust of a mummer's knife,  
Dead—for a taffeta gown!

The wine that God had set apart,  
The noblest wine of all,  
Wine of the grapes that angels trod,  
The vintage of the glory of God,  
The crimson wine of that rich heart,  
Spilt in a drunken brawl,

Poured out to make a steaming bath  
That night in the Devil's Inn,  
A steaming bath of living wine  
Poured out for Circe and her swine,  
A bath of blood for a harlot  
To supple and sleek her skin.

And many a fool that finds it sweet  
Through all the years to be,  
Crowning a lie with Marlowe's fame,  
Will ape the sin, will ape the shame,  
Will ape our captain in defeat;  
But—not in victory;

Till Art become a leaping-house,  
And Death be crowned as Life,  
And one wild jest outshine the soul  
Of Truth . . . O, fool, is this your goal?  
You are not our Kit Marlowe,  
But the drunkard with the knife;

Not Marlowe, but the Jack-o'-Lent  
That lured him o'er the fen!  
O, ay, the tavern is in its place,  
And the punk's painted smiling face,  
But where is our Kit Marlowe  
The man, the king of men?

Passion? You kiss the painted mouth,  
The hand that clipped his wings,  
The hand that into his heart she thrust  
And tuned him to her whimpering lust,  
And played upon his quivering youth  
As a crowder plucks the strings.

But he who dared the thunder-roll,  
Whose eagle-wings could soar,  
Buffeting down the clouds of night,  
To beat against the Light of Light,  
That great God-blinded eagle-soul,  
We shall not see him more."

## V

## THE COMPANION OF A MILE

THWACK! *Thwack!* One early dawn upon our door  
I heard the bladder of some motley fool  
Bouncing, and all the dusk of London shook  
With bells! I leapt from bed,—had I forgotten?—  
I flung my easement wide and craned my neck  
Over the painted Mermaid. There he stood,  
His right leg yellow and his left leg blue,  
With jingling cap, a sheep-bell at his tail,  
Wielding his eel-skin bladder,—*bang! thwack! bang!*—  
Catching a comrade's head with the recoil  
And skipping away! All Bread Street dimly burned  
Like a reflected sky, green, red and white  
With littered branches, ferns and hawthorn-clouds;  
For, round Sir Fool, a frolic morrice-troop  
Of players, poets, prentices, mad-cap queans,  
Robins and Marians, coloured like the dawn,  
And sparkling like the greenwood whence they came  
With their fresh boughs all dewy from the dark,  
Clamoured, *Come down! Come down, and let us in!*  
High over these, I suddenly saw Sir Fool  
Leap to a sign-board, swing to a conduit-head,  
And perch there, gorgeous on the morning sky,  
Tossing his crimson cockscomb to the blue  
And crowing like Chanticleer, *Give them a rouse!*  
*Tickle it, tabourer! Nimbly, lasses, nimbly!*  
*Tuck up your russet petticoats and dance!*  
*Let the Cheape know it is the first of May!*

And as I seized shirt, doublet and trunk-hose,  
I saw the hobby-horse come cantering down,  
A pasteboard steed, dappled a rosy white  
Like peach-bloom, bridled with purple, bitted with gold,  
A crimson foot-cloth on his royal flanks,  
And, riding him, His Majesty of the May!  
Round him the whole crowd frolicked with a shout,  
And as I stumbled down the crooked stair  
I heard them break into a dance and sing:—

## SONG

## I

Into the woods we'll trip and go,  
Up and down and to and fro,  
Under the moon to fetch in May,  
And two by two till break of day,  
    A-maying,  
    A-playing,  
For Love knows no gain-saying!  
Wisdom trips not? Even so—  
Come, young lovers, trip and go,  
    Trip and go.

## II

Out of the woods we'll dance and sing  
Under the morning-star of Spring,  
Into the town with our fresh boughs  
And knock at every sleeping house,  
    Not sighing,  
    Or crying,  
Though Love knows no denying!  
Then, round your summer queen and king,  
Come, young lovers, dance and sing,  
    Dance and sing!

"Chorus," the great Fool tossed his gorgeous crest,  
And lustily crew against the deepening dawn,  
"Chorus," till all the Cheape caught the refrain,  
And, with a double thunder of frolic feet,  
Its ancient nut-brown tabors woke the Strand:—

A-maying,  
A-playing,  
For Love knows no gain-saying!  
Wisdom trips not? Even so,—  
Come, young lovers, trip and go,  
Trip and go.

Into the Mermaid with a shout they rushed  
As I shot back the bolts, and *bang, thwack, bang*,  
The bladder bounced about me. What cared I?  
This was all England's holy-day! "Come in,  
My yellow-hammers," roared the Friar Tuck  
Of this mad morrice, "come you into church,  
My nightingales, my scraps of Lincoln green,  
And hear my sermon!" On a window-seat  
He stood, against the diamonded rich panes  
In the old oak parlour and, throwing back his hood,  
Who should it be but Ben, rare Ben himself?  
The wild troupe laughed around him, some a-sprawl  
On tables, kicking parti-coloured heels,  
Some with their Marians jigging on their knees,  
And, in the front of all, the motley fool  
Cross-legged upon the rushes.

O, I knew him,—  
Will Kemp, the player, who danced from London town  
To Norwich in nine days and was proclaimed  
Freeman of Marchaunt Venturers and hedge-king  
Of English morrice-dancery for ever!  
His nine-days' wonder, through the countryside  
Was hawked by every ballad-monger. Kemp  
Raged at their shake-rag Muses. None but I  
Guessed ever for what reason, since he chose  
His anticks for himself and, in his games,  
Was more than most May-fools fantastical.  
I watched his thin face, as he rocked and crooned,

Shaking the squirrels' tails around his ears;  
And, out of all the players I had seen,  
His face was quickest through its clay to flash  
The passing mood. Though not a muscle stirred,  
The very skin of it seemed to flicker and gleam  
With little summer lightnings of the soul  
At every fleeting fancy. For a man  
So quick to bleed at a pin-prick or to leap  
Laughing through hell to save a butterfly,  
This world was difficult; and perchance he found  
In his fantastic games that open road  
Which even Will Shakespeare only found at last  
In motley and with some wild straws in his hair.  
But "Drawer! drawer!" bellowed Friar Ben,  
"Make ready a righteous breakfast while I preach;—  
Tankards of nut-brown ale, and cold roast beef,  
Cracknels, old cheese, flaunes, tarts and clotted cream.  
Hath any a wish not circumscribed by these?"

"A white-pot custard, for my white-pot queen,"  
Cried Kemp, waving his bauble, "mark this, boy,  
A white-pot custard for my queen of May,—  
She is not here, but that concerns not thee!—  
A white-pot Mermaid custard, with a crust,  
Lashings of cream, eggs, apple-pulse and spice,  
A little sugar and manchet bread. Away!  
Be swift!"

And as I hustled to and fro,  
The Friar raised his big brown fists again  
And preached in mockery of the Puritans  
Who thought to strip the moonshine wings from Mab,  
Tear down the May-poles, rout our English games,  
And drive all beauty back into the sea.

Then laughter and chatter and clashing tankards drowned  
All but their May-day jollity a-while.  
But, as their breakfast ended, and I sank  
Gasping upon a bench, there came still more  
Poets and players crowding into the room;  
And one—I only knew him as Sir John—

Waved a great ballad at Will Kemp and laughed,  
“Atonement, Will, atonement!”

“What,” groaned Kemp,  
“Another penny poet? How many lies  
Does *this* rogue tell? Sir, I have suffered much  
From these Melpomenes and strawberry quills,  
And think them better at their bloody lines  
On *The Blue Lady*. Sir, they set to work  
At seven o’clock in the morning, the same hour  
That I, myself, that’s *Cavaliero* Kemp,  
With heels of feather and heart of cork, began  
Frolickly footing, from the great Lord Mayor  
Of London, tow’rds the worshipful Master Mayor  
Of Norwich.”

“Nay, Kemp, this is a May-day tune,  
A morrice of country rhymes, made by a poet  
Who thought it shame so worthy an act as thine  
Should wither in oblivion if the Muse  
With her Castalian showers could keep it green.  
And while the fool nid-nodded all in time,  
Sir John, in swinging measure, trolled this tale:—

## I

With Georgie Sprat, my overseer, and Thomas Slye, my  
tabourer,  
And William Bee, my courier, when dawn emblazed the  
skies,  
I met a tall young butcher as I danced by little Sudbury,  
Head-master o’ morrice-dancers all, high headborough of  
hyes.

By Sudbury, by Sudbury, by little red-roofed Sudbury,  
He wished to dance a mile with me! I made a courtly bow:  
I fitted him with morrice-bells, with treble, bass and tenor  
bells,  
And “*Tickle your tabor, Tom,*” I cried, “*we’re going to market  
now.*”

And rollicking down the lanes we dashed, and frolicking up  
the hills we clashed,  
And like a sail behind me flapped his great white frock  
a-while,  
Till, with a gasp, he sank and swore that he could dance with  
me no more;  
And—over the hedge a milk-maid laughed, *Not dance with  
him a mile?*

“You lout!” she laughed, “I’ll leave my pail, and dance with  
him for cakes and ale!  
I’ll dance a mile for love,” she laughed, “and win my wager,  
too.  
Your feet are shod and mine are bare; but when could leather  
dance on air?  
A milk-maid’s feet can fall as fair and light as falling dew.”

I fitted her with morrice-bells, with treble, bass and tenor  
bells:  
The fore-bells, as I linked them at her throat, how soft  
they sang!  
Green linnets in a golden nest, they chirped and trembled on  
her breast,  
And, faint as elfin blue-bells, at her nut-brown ankles rang.

I fitted her with morrice-bells that sweetened into woodbine  
bells,  
And trembled as I hung them there and crowned her sunny  
brow:  
“Strike up,” she laughed, “my summer king!” And all her  
bells began to ring,  
And “*Tickle your tabor, Tom,*” I cried, “*we’re going to  
Sherwood now!*”

When cocks were crowing, and light was growing, and horns  
were blowing, and milk-pails flowing,  
We swam thro’ waves of emerald gloom along a chestnut  
aisle,  
Then, up a shining hawthorn-lane, we sailed into the sun  
again,  
Will Kemp and his companion, his companion of a mile.

"Truer than most," snarled Kemp, "but mostly lies!  
 And why does he forget the miry lanes  
 By Brainford with thick woods on either side,  
 And the deep holes, where I could find no ease  
 But skipped up to my waist?" A crackling laugh  
 Broke from his lips which, if he had not worn  
 The cap and bells, would scarce have roused the mirth  
 Of good Sir John, who roundly echoed it,  
 Then waved his hand and said, "Nay, but he treats  
 Your morrice in the spirit of Lucian, Will,  
 Who thought that dancing was no mushroom growth,  
 But sprung from the beginning of the world  
 When Love persuaded earth, air, water, fire,  
 And all the jarring elements to move  
 In measure. Right to the heart of it, my lad,  
 The song goes, though the skin mislike you so."  
 "Nay, an there's more of it, I'll sing it, too!  
 'Tis a fine tale, Sir John, I have it by heart,  
 Although 'tis lies throughout." Up leapt Will Kemp,  
 And crouched and swayed, and swung his bauble round,  
 Making the measure as they trolled the tale,  
 Chanting alternately, each answering each.

## II

*The Fool*

The tabor fainted far behind us, but her feet that day  
 They beat a rosier morrice o'er the fairy-circled green.

*Sir John*

And o'er a field of buttercups, a field of lambs and buttercups,  
 We danced along a cloth of gold, a summer king and queen!

*The Fool*

And straying we went, and swaying we went, with lambkins  
 round us playing we went;  
 Her face uplift to drink the sun, and not for me her smile,  
 We danced, a king and queen of May, upon a fleeting holy-  
 day,  
 But O, she'd won her wager, my companion of a mile!

*Sir John*

Her rosy lips they never spoke, though every rosy foot-fall  
     broke  
 The dust, the dust to Eden-bloom; and, past the throb-  
     bing blue,  
 All ordered to her rhythmic feet, the stars were dancing with  
     my sweet,  
 And all the world a morrice-dance!

*The Fool*

She knew not; but I knew!  
 Love like Amphion with his lyre, made all the elements con-  
     spire  
 To build His world of music. All in rhythmic rank and file,  
 I saw them in their cosmic dance, catch hands across, retire,  
     advance,  
 For me and my companion, my companion of a mile!

*Sir John*

The little leaves on every tree, the rivers winding to the sea,  
 The swinging tides, the wheeling winds, the rolling heavens  
     above,  
 Around the May-pole Igdrasil, they worked the Morrice-  
     master's will,  
 Persuaded into measure by the all-creative Love.

That hour I saw, from depth to height, this wildering universe  
     unite!  
 The lambs of God around us and His passion in every  
     flower!

*The Fool*

His grandeur in the dust, His dust a blaze of blinding majesty,  
     And all His immortality in one poor mortal hour.

And Death was but a change of key in Life the golden melody,  
     And Time became Eternity, and Heaven a fleeting smile;  
 For all was each and each was all, and all a wedded unity,  
     Her heart in mine, and mine in my companion of a mile

*Thwack! Thwack!* He whirled his bauble round about,  
 "This fellow beats them all," he cried, "the worst  
 Those others wrote was that I hopped from York  
 To Paris with a mortar on my head.  
 This fellow sends me leaping through the clouds  
 To buss the moon! The best is yet to come;  
 Strike up, Sir John! Ha! ha! You know no more?"  
 Kemp leapt upon a table. "Clear the way,  
 He cried, and with a great stamp of his foot  
 And a wild crackling laugh, drew all to hark.

"With hey and ho, through thick and thin,  
 The hobby-horse is forgotten.  
 But I must finish what I begin,  
 Tho' all the roads be rotten.

"By all those twenty thousand chariots, Ben,  
 Hear this true tale they shall! Now, let me see,  
 Where was Will Kemp? Bussing the moon's pale mouth?  
 Ah, yes!" He crouched above the listening throng,—  
 "Good as a play," I heard one whispering quean,—  
 And, waving his bauble, shuffling with his feet  
 In a dance that marked the time, he sank his voice  
 As if to breathe great secrets, and so sang:—

## III

At Melford town, at Melford town, at little grey-roofed  
 Melford town,  
 A long mile from Sudbury, upon the village green,  
 We danced into a merry rout of country-folk that skipt about  
 A hobby-horse, a May-pole, and a laughing white-pot queen.

They thronged about us as we stayed, and there I gave my  
 sunshine maid  
 An English crown for cakes and ale—her dancing was so  
 true!  
 And "Nay," she said, "I danced my mile for love!" I  
 answered with a smile,  
 "'Tis but a silver token, lass, thou'st won that wager, too."

I took my leash of morrice-bells, my treble, bass and tenor  
bells,  
They pealed like distant marriage-bells! And up came  
William Bee  
With Georgie Sprat, my overseer, and Thomas Slye, my  
tabourer,  
"Farewell," she laughed, and vanished with a Suffolk  
courtesie.  
I leapt away to Rockland, and from Rockland on to Hing-  
ham,  
From Hingham on to Norwich, sirs! I hardly heard  
a-while  
The throngs that followed after, with their shouting and their  
laughter,  
For a shadow danced beside me, my companion of a mile!

At Norwich, by St. Giles his gate, I entered, and the Mayor  
in state,  
With all the rosy knights and squires for twenty miles about,  
With trumpets and with minstrelsy, was waiting there to  
welcome me;  
And, as I skipt into the street, the City raised a shout.

They gave me what I did not seek. I fed on roasted swans a  
week!  
They pledged me in their malmsey, and they lined me  
warm with ale!  
They sleeked my skin with red-deer pies, and all that runs and  
swims and flies;  
But, through the clashing wine-cups, O, I heard her clanking  
pail.

And, rising from his crimson chair, the worshipful and portly  
Mayor  
Bequeathed me forty shillings every year that I should live,  
With five good angels in my hand that I might drink while I  
could stand!  
They gave me golden angels! What I lacked they could not  
give.

They made Will Kemp, thenceforward, sirs, Freeman of  
Marchaunt Venturers!  
They hoped that I would dance again from Norwich up to  
York;  
Then they asked me, all together, had I met with right May  
weather,  
And they praised my heels of feather, and my heart, my  
heart of cork.

As I came home by Sudbury, by little red-roofed Sudbury,  
I waited for my bare-foot maid, among her satin kine!  
I heard a peal of wedding-bells, of treble, bass and tenor bells:  
“Ring well,” I cried, “this bridal morn! You soon shall  
ring for mine!”

I found her foot-prints in the grass, just where she stood and  
saw me pass.  
I stood within her own sweet field and waited for my may.  
I laughed. The dance has turned about! I stand within:  
she'll pass without,  
And—*down the road the wedding came, the road I danced that day!*

*I saw the wedding-folk go by, with laughter and with minstrelsy,  
I gazed across her own sweet hedge, I caught her happy smile,  
I saw the tall young butcher pass to little red-roofed Sudbury,  
His bride upon his arm, my lost companion of a mile.*

Down from his table leapt the motley Fool.  
His bladder bounced from head to ducking head,  
His crackling laugh rang high,—“Sir John, I danced  
In February, and the song says May!  
A fig for all your poets, liars all!  
Away to Fenchurch Street, lasses and lads,  
They hold high revel there this May-day morn.  
Away!” The mad-cap throng echoed the cry.  
He drove them with his bauble through the door;  
Then, as the last gay kerchief fluttered out  
He gave one little sharp sad lingering cry  
As of a lute-string breaking. He turned back

And threw himself along a low dark bench;  
 His jingling cap was crumpled in his fist,  
 And, as he lay there, all along Cheapside  
 The happy voices of his comrades rang:—

Out of the woods we'll dance and sing  
 Under the morning-star of Spring,  
 Into the town with our fresh boughs  
 And knock at every sleeping house,  
 Not sighing,  
 Or crying,  
 Though Love knows no denying!  
 Then, round your summer queen and king,  
 Come, young lovers, dance and sing,  
 Dance and sing!

His motley shoulders heaved. I touched his arm,  
 "What ails you, sir?" He raised his thin white face,  
 Wet with the May-dew still. A few stray petals  
 Clung in his tangled hair. He leapt to his feet,  
 "Twas February, but I danced, boy, danced  
 In May! Can you do this?" Forward he bent  
 Over his feet, and shuffled it, heel and toe,  
 Out of the Mermaid, singing his old song—

A-maying,  
 A-playing,  
 For Love knows no gain-saying!  
 Wisdom trips not? Even so,—  
 Come, young lovers, trip and go,  
 Trip and go.

Five minutes later, over the roaring Strand,  
 "*Chorus!*" I heard him crow, and half the town  
 Reeled into music under his crimson comb.

## VI

## BIG BEN

GODS, what a hubbub shook our cobwebs out  
 The day that Chapman, Marston and our Ben  
 Waited in Newgate for the hangman's hands.

Chapman and Marston had been flung there first  
 For some imagined insult to the Scots  
 In *Eastward Ho*, the play they wrote with Ben.  
 But Ben was famous now, and our brave law  
 Would fain have winked and passed the big man by.  
 The lesser men had straightway been condemned  
 To have their ears cut off, their noses slit,  
 With other tortures.

Ben had risen at that!

He gripped his cudgel, called for a quart of ale,  
 Then like Helvellyn with his rocky face  
 And mountain-belly, he surged along Cheapside,  
 Snorting with wrath, and rolled into the gaol,  
 To share the punishment.

“There is my mark!

’Tis not the first time you have branded me,”  
 Said our big Ben, and thrust his broad left thumb  
 Branded with T for Tyburn, into the face  
 Of every protest. “That’s the mark you gave me  
 Because I killed my man in Spitalfields,  
 A duel honest as any your courtiers fight.  
 But I was no Fitzdotterel, bore no gules  
 And azure, robbed no silk-worms for my hose,  
 I was Ben Jonson, out of Annandale,  
 Bricklayer in common to the good Lord God.  
 You branded me. I am Ben Jonson still.  
 You cannot rub it out.”

The Mermaid Inn

Buzzed like a hornet’s nest, upon the day  
 Fixed for their mutilation. And the stings  
 Were ready, too; for rapiers flashed and clashed  
 Among the tankards. Dekker was there, and Nash,  
 Brome (Jonson’s body-servant, whom he taught  
 His art of verse and, more than that, to love him,)  
 And half a dozen more. They planned to meet  
 The prisoners going to Tyburn, and attempt  
 A desperate rescue.

All at once we heard  
 A great gay song come marching down the street,  
 A single voice, and twenty marching men,  
 Then the full chorus, twenty voices strong:—

The prentice whistles at break of day  
 All under fair roofs and towers,  
 When the old Cheape openeth every way  
 Her little sweet inns like flowers;  
 And he sings like a lark, both early and late,  
 To think, if his house take fire,  
 At the good *Green Dragon* in Bishopsgate  
 He may drink to his heart's desire.

*Chorus:* Or sit at his ease in the old *Cross Keys*  
 And drink to his heart's desire.

But I, as I walk by *Red Rose Lane*,  
 Tho' it warmeth my heart to see  
*The Swan*, *The Golden Hynde*, and *The Crane*,  
 With the door set wide for me;  
 Tho' Signs like daffodils paint the strand  
 When the thirsty bees begin,  
 Of all the good taverns in Engeland  
 My choice is—*The Mermaid Inn*.

*Chorus:* There is much to be said for *The Saracen's Head*,  
 But my choice is *The Mermaid Inn*.

Into the tavern they rushed, these roaring boys.  
 "Now broach your ripest and your best," they cried.  
 "All's well! They are all released! They are on the way!  
 Old Camden and young Selden worked the trick.  
 Where is Dame Dimpling? Where's our jolly hostess?  
 Tell her the Mermaid Tavern will have guests:  
 We are sent to warn her. She must raid Cook's Row,  
 And make their ovens roar. Nobody dines  
 This day with old Duke Humphrey. Red-deer pies,  
 Castles of almond crust, a shield of brawn  
 Big as the nether millstone, barrels of wine,  
 Three roasted peacocks! Ben is on the way!"  
 Then all the rafters rang with song again:—

There was a Prince—long since, long since!—  
 To East Cheape did resort,  
 For that he loved *The Blue Boar's Head*  
 Far better than Crown or Court;

But old King Harry in Westminster  
 Hung up, for all to see,  
 Three bells of power in St. Stephen's Tower,  
 Yea, bells of a thousand and three.

*Chorus:* Three bells of power in a timber tower,  
 Thirty thousand and three.

For Harry the Fourth was a godly king  
 And loved great godly bells!  
 He bade them ring and he bade them swing  
 Till a man might hear nought else.  
 In every tavern it soured the sack  
 With discord and with din;  
 But they drowned it all in a madrigal  
 Like this, at *The Mermaid Inn*.

*Chorus:* They drowned it all in a madrigal  
 Like this, at *The Mermaid Inn*.

"But how did Selden work it?"—"Nobody knows.  
 They will be here anon. Better ask Will.  
 He's the magician!"—"Ah, here comes Dame Dimpling!"  
 And, into the rollicking chaos our good Dame  
 —A Dame of only two and thirty springs—  
 All lavender and roses and white kerchief,  
 Bustled, to lay the tables.

Fletcher flung  
 His arm around her waist and kissed her cheek.  
 But all she said was, "One—two—three—four—five—  
*Six at a pinch, in yonder window-seat.*"  
 "A health to our Dame Dimpling," Beaumont cried,  
 And Dekker, leaping on the old black settle,  
 Led all their tumult into a song again:—

What is the Mermaid's merriest toast?  
 Our hostess—good Dame Dimpling!  
 Who is it rules the Mermaid roast?  
 Who is it bangs the Mermaid host,  
 Tho' her hands be soft as her heart almost?  
 Dame Dimpling!

She stands at the board in her fresh blue gown  
With the sleeves tucked up—Dame Dimpling!  
She rolls the white dough up and down  
And her pies are crisp, and her eyes are brown.  
So—she is the Queen of all this town,—  
Dame Dimpling!

Her sheets are white as black-thorn bloom,  
White as her neck, Dame Dimpling!  
Her lavender sprigs in the London gloom  
Make every little bridal-room  
A country nook of fresh perfume,—  
Dame Dimpling!

She wears white lace on her dark brown hair:  
And a rose on her breast, Dame Dimpling!  
And who can show you a foot as fair  
Or an ankle as neat when she climbs the stair,  
Taper in hand, and head in the air,  
And a rose in her cheek?—O, past compare,  
Dame Dimpling!

“But don’t forget those oyster-pies,” cried Lylly.  
“Nor the roast beef,” roared Dekker. “Prove yourself  
The Muse of meat and drink.”

There was a shout  
In Bread Street, and our windows all swung wide,  
Six heads at each.

Nat Field bestrode our sign  
And kissed the painted Mermaid on her lips,  
Then waved his tankard.

“Here they come,” he cried.  
“Camden and Selden, Chapman and Marston, too,  
And half Will’s company with our big Ben  
Riding upon their shoulders.”

“Look!” cried Dekker,  
“But where is Atlas now? O, let them have it!  
A thumping chorus, lads! Let the roof crack!”  
And all the Mermaid clashed and banged again  
In thunderous measure to the marching tune  
That rolled down Bread Street, forty voices strong:—

At *Ypres Inn*, by *Wring-wren Lane*,  
 Old John of Gaunt would dine:  
 He scarce had opened an oyster or twain,  
     Or drunk one flagon of wine,  
 When, all along the Vintry Ward,  
     He heard the trumpets blow,  
 And a voice that roared—"If thou love thy lord,  
     Tell John of Gaunt to go!"

*Chorus:* A great voice roared—"If thou love thy lord,  
     Tell John of Gaunt to go!"

Then into the room rushed Haviland  
     That fair fat Flemish host,  
 "They are marching hither with sword and brand,  
     Ten thousand men—almost!  
 It is these oysters or thy sweet life,  
     Thy blood or the best of the bin?"—  
 "Proud Pump, avaunt!" quoth John of Gaunt,  
     "I will dine at *The Mermaid Inn*!"

*Chorus:* "Proud Pump, avaunt!" quoth John of Gaunt,  
     "There is wine at *The Mermaid Inn*!"

And in came Ben like a great galleon poised  
 High on the white crest of a shouting wave,  
 And then the feast began. The fragrant steam  
 As from the kitchens of Olympus drew  
 A throng of ragged urchins to our doors.  
 Ben ordered them a castellated pie  
 That rolled a cloud around them where they sat  
 Munching upon the cobblestones. Our casements  
 Dripped with the golden dews of Helicon;  
 And, under the warm feast our cellarage  
 Gurgled and foamed in the delicious cool  
 With crimson freshets—

"Tell us," cried Nat Field,  
 When pipes began to puff. "How did you work it?"  
 Camden chuckled and tugged his long white beard.  
 "Out of the mouth of babes," he said and shook  
 His head at Selden! "O, young man, young man,  
 There's a career before you! Selden did it.

Take my advice, my children. Make young Selden  
 Solicitor-general to the Mermaid Inn.  
 That rosy silken smile of his conceals  
 A scholar! Yes, that suckling lawyer there  
 Puts my grey beard to shame. His courteous airs  
 And silken manners hide the nimblest wit  
 That ever trimmed a sail to catch the wind  
 Of courtly favour. Mark my words now, Ben,  
 That youth will sail right up against the wind  
 By skilful tacking. But you run it fine,  
 Selden, you run it fine. Take my advice  
 And don't be too ironical, my boy,  
 Or even the King will see it."

He chuckled again.

"But tell them of your tractate!"

"Here it is,"

Quoth Selden, twisting a lighted paper spill,  
 Then, with his round cherubic face aglow  
 Lit his long silver pipe,

"Why, first," he said,  
 "Camden being Clarenceux King-at-arms,  
 He read the King this little tract I wrote  
 Against tobacco." And the Mermaid roared  
 With laughter. "Well, you went the way to hang  
 All three of them," cried Lylly, "and, as for Ben,  
 His Trinidad goes to bed with him."

"Green gosling, quack no more," Selden replied,  
 Smiling that rosy silken smile anew.

"The King's a *critic!* When have critics known  
 The poet from his creatures, God from me?  
 How many cite Polonius to their sons  
 And call it Shakespeare? Well, I took my text  
 From sundry creatures of our great big Ben,  
 And called it 'Jonson.'

Camden read it out

Without the flicker of an eye. His beard  
 Saved us, I think. The King admired his text.  
*'There is a man,'* he read, *'lies at death's door*  
*Thro' taking of tobacco. Yesterday*  
*He voided a bushel of soot.'*

'God bless my soul,  
 A bushel of soot! Think of it!' said the King.  
 'The man who wrote those great and splendid words,'  
 Camden replied,—I had prepared his case  
 Carefully—'lies in Newgate prison, sire.  
 His nose and ears await the hangman's knife.'

'Ah,' said the shrewd King, goggling his great eyes  
 Cannily. 'Did he not defame the Scots?'  
 'That's true,' said Camden, like a man that hears  
 Truth for the first time. 'O ay, he defamed 'em,'  
 The King said, very wisely, once again.  
 'Ah, but,' says Camden, like a man that strives  
 With more than mortal wit, 'only such Scots  
 As flout your majesty, and take tobacco.  
 He is a Scot, himself, and hath the gift  
 Of preaching.' Then we gave him Jonson's lines  
 Against Virginia. '*Neither do thou lust*  
*After that tawny weed; for who can tell,*  
*Before the gathering and the making up,*  
*What alligarta may have spawned thereon,*'  
 Or words to that effect.

‘Magneeficent!’

Spluttered the King—‘who knows? Who knows, indeed?  
 That's a grand touch, that Alligarta, Camden!’  
 ‘The Scot who wrote those great and splendid words,’  
 Said Camden, ‘languishes in Newgate, sire.  
 His ears and nose—’

And there, as we arranged  
 With Inigo Jones, the ladies of the court  
 Assailed the King in tears. Their masque and ball  
 Would all be ruined. All their Grecian robes,  
 Procured at vast expense, were wasted now.  
 The masque was not half-written. Master Jones  
 Had lost his poets. They were all in gaol.  
 Their noses and their ears . . . .

‘God bless my soul,’

Spluttered the King, goggling his eyes again,  
 ‘What d'you make of it, Camden?’—

'I should say

A Puritan plot, sire; for these justices—  
 Who love tobacco—use their law, it seems,  
 To flout your Majesty at every turn.  
 If this continue, sire, there'll not be left  
 A loyal ear or nose in all your realm.'  
 At that, our noble monarch well-nigh swooned.  
 He hunched his body, padded as it was  
 Against the assassin's knife, six inches deep  
 With great green quilts, wagged his enormous head,  
 Then, in a dozen words, he wooed destruction:  
 'It is presumption and a high contempt  
 In subjects to dispute what kings can do,'  
 He whimpered. 'Even as it is blasphemy  
 To thwart the will of God.'

He waved his hand,  
 And rose. 'These men must be released, at once!'  
 Then, as I think, to seek a safer place,  
 He waddled from the room, his rickety legs  
 Doubling beneath that great green feather-bed  
 He calls his 'person.'—I shall dream to-night  
 Of spiders, Camden.—But in half an hour,  
 Inigo Jones was armed with Right Divine  
 To save such ears and noses as the ball  
 Required for its perfection. Think of that!  
 And let this earthly ball remember, too,  
 That Chapman, Marston, and our great big Ben  
 Owe their poor adjuncts to—ten Grecian robes  
 And 'Jonson' on tobacco! England loves  
 Her poets, O, supremely, when they're dead."  
 "But Ben has narrowly escaped her love,"  
 Said Chapman gravely.

"What do you mean?" said Lodge.  
 And, as he spoke, there was a sudden hush.  
 A tall gaunt woman with great burning eyes,  
 And white hair blown back softly from a face  
 Ethereally fierce, as might have looked  
 Cassandra in old age, stood at the door.  
 "Where is my Ben?" she said.

"Mother!" cried Ben.  
 He rose and caught her in his mighty arms.

Her labour-reddened, long-boned hands entwined  
Behind his neck.

"She brought this to the gaol,"  
Said Chapman quietly, tossing a phial across  
To Camden. "And he meant to take it, too,  
Before the hangman touched him. Half an hour  
And you'd have been too late to save big Ben.  
He has lived too much in ancient Rome to love  
A slit nose and the pillory. He'd have wrapped  
His purple round him like an emperor.

I think she had another for herself."

"There's Roman blood in both of them," said Dekker,  
"Don't look. She is weeping now." And, while Ben held  
That gaunt old body sobbing against his heart,  
Dekker, to make her think they paid no heed,  
Began to sing; and very softly now,  
Full forty voices echoed the refrain:—

*The Cardinal's Hat* is a very good inn,  
And so is *The Puritan's Head*;  
But I know a sign of a Wine, a Wine  
That is better when all is said.  
It is whiter than Venus, redder than Mars,  
It was old when the world begun;  
For all good inns are moons or stars  
But *The Mermaid* is their Sun.

*Chorus:* They are all alright like moons in the night,  
But *The Mermaid* is their Sun.

Therefore, when priest or parson cries  
That inns like flowers increase,  
I say that mine inn is a church likewise,  
And I say to them "Be at peace!"  
An host may gather in dark St. Paul's  
To salve their souls from sin;  
But the Light may be where "two or three"  
Drink Wine in *The Mermaid Inn*.

*Chorus:* The Light may be where "two or three"  
Drink Wine in *The Mermaid Inn*.

## VII

## THE BURIAL OF A QUEEN

'TWAS on an All Souls' Eve that our good Inn  
—Whereof, for ten years now, myself was host—  
Heard and took part in its most eerie tale.

It was a bitter night, and master Ben,  
—His hair now flecked with grey, though youth still fired  
His deep and ageless eyes,—in the old oak-chair,  
Over the roaring hearth, puffed at his pipe;  
A little sad, as often I found him now  
Remembering vanished faces. Yet the years  
Brought others round him. Wreaths of Heliochrise  
Gleamed still in that great tribe of Benjamin,  
Burned still across the malmsey and muscadel.  
Chapman and Browne, Herrick,—a name like thyme  
Crushed into sweetness by a bare-foot maid  
Milking, at dewy dawn, in Elfin-land,—  
These three came late, and sat in a little room  
Aside, supping together, on one great pie,  
Whereof both crust and coffin were prepared  
By master Herrick's receipt, and all washed down  
With mighty cups of sack. This left with Ben,  
John Ford, wrapped in his cloak, brooding aloof,  
Drayton and Lodge and Drummond of Hawthornden.

Suddenly, in the porch, I heard a sound  
Of iron that grated on the flags. A spade  
And pick came edging through the door.

“O, room!  
Room for the master-craftsman,” muttered Ford,  
And grey old sexton Scarlet hobbled in.

He shuffled off the snow that clogged his boots,  
—On my clean rushes!—brushed it from his cloak  
Of Northern Russet, wiped his rheumatic knees,  
Blew out his lanthorn, hung it on a nail,  
Leaned his rude pick and spade against the wall,  
Flung back his rough frieze hood, flapped his gaunt arms,  
And called for ale.

"Come to the fire," said Lodge.

"Room for the wisest counsellor of kings,  
The kindly sage that puts us all to bed,  
And tucks us up beneath the grass-green quilt."

"Plenty of work, eh Timothy?" said Ben.

"Work? Where's my liquor? O, ay, there's work to spare,"  
Old Scarlet croaked, then quaffed his creaming stoup,  
While Ben said softly—"Pity you could not spare,  
You and your Scythe-man, some of the golden lads  
That I have seen here in the Mermaid Inn!"  
Then, with a quiet smile he shook his head  
And turned to master Drummond of Hawthornden.  
"Well, songs are good; but flesh and blood are better.  
The grey old tomb of Horace glows for me  
Across the centuries, with one little fire  
Lit by a girl's light hand." Then, under breath,  
Yet with some passion, he murmured this brief rhyme:—

## I

*Dulce ridentem*, laughing through the ages,  
*Dulce loquentem*, O, fairer far to me,  
Rarer than the wisdom of all his golden pages  
Floats the happy laughter of his vanished Lalage.

## II

*Dulce loquentem*,—we hear it and we know it.  
*Dulce ridentem*,—so musical and low.  
"Mightier than marble is my song!" Ah, did the poet  
Know why little Lalage was mightier even so?

## III

*Dulce ridentem*,—through all the years that sever,  
Clear as o'er yon hawthorn hedge we heard her passing  
by,—  
*Lalagen amabo*,—a song may live for ever  
*Dulce loquentem*,—but Lalage must die.

"I'd like to learn that rhyme," the sexton said.

"I've a fine memory too. You start me now,  
I'd keep it up all night with ancient ballads."

And then—a strange thing happened. I saw John Ford  
"With folded arms and melancholy hat"  
(As in our Mermaid jest he still would sit)  
Watching old Scarlet like a man in trance.  
The sexton gulped his ale and smacked his lips,  
Then croaked again—"O, ay, there's work to spare,  
We fills 'em faster than the spades can dig,"  
And, all at once, the lights burned low and blue.  
Ford leaned right forward, with his grim black eyes  
Widening.

"Why, that's a marvellous ring!" he said,  
And pointed to the sexton's gnarled old hand  
Spread on the black oak-table like the claw  
Of some great bird of prey. "A ruby worth  
The ransom of a queen!" The fire leapt up!  
The sexton stared at him;  
Then stretched his hand out, with its blue-black nails,  
Full in the light, a grim earth-coloured hand,  
But bare as it was born.

"There was a ring!  
I could have sworn it! Red as blood!" cried Ford.  
And Ben and Lodge and Drummond of Hawthornden  
All stared at him. For such a silent soul  
Was master Ford that, when he suddenly spake,  
It struck the rest as dumb as if the Sphinx  
Had opened its cold stone lips. He would sit mute  
Brooding, aloof, for hours, his cloak around him,  
A staff between his knees, as if prepared  
For a long journey, a lonely pilgrimage  
To some dark tomb; a strange and sorrowful soul,  
Yet not—as many thought him—harsh or hard,  
But of a most kind patience. Though he wrote  
In blood, they say, the blood came from his heart;  
And all the sufferings of this world he took  
To his own soul, and bade them pasture there.  
Till out of his compassion, he became  
A monument of bitterness. He rebelled;  
And so fell short of that celestial height

Whereto the greatest only climb, who stand  
By Shakespeare, and accept the Eternal Law.  
These find, in law, firm footing for the soul,  
The strength that binds the stars, and reins the sea,  
The base of being, the pillars of the world,  
The pledge of honour, the pure cord of love,  
The form of truth, the golden floors of heaven.  
These men discern a height beyond all heights,  
A depth below all depths, and never an end  
Without a pang beyond it, and a hope;  
Without a heaven beyond it, and a hell.  
For these, despair is like a bubble pricked,  
An old romance to make young lovers weep.  
For these, the law becomes a fiery road,  
A Jacob's ladder through that vast abyss  
Lacking no rung from realm to loftier realm,  
Nor wanting one degree from dust to wings.  
These, at the last, radiant with victory,  
Lay their strong hands upon the wingèd steeds  
And fiery chariots, and exult to hold,  
Themselves, the throbbing reins, whereby they steer  
The stormy splendours.

He, being less, rebelled,  
Cried out for unreined steeds, and unruled stars,  
An unprohibited ocean and a truth  
Untrue; and the equal thunder of the law  
Hurled him to night and chaos, who was born  
To shine upon the forehead of the day.  
And yet—the voice of darkness and despair  
May speak for heaven where heaven would not be heard,  
May fight for heaven where heaven would not prevail,  
And the consummate splendour of that strife,  
Swallowing up all discords, all defeat,  
In one huge victory, harmonising all,  
Make Lucifer, at last, at one with God.

There,—on that All Souls' Eve, you might have thought  
A dead man spoke, to see how Drayton stared,  
And Drummond started.

“You saw no ruby ring,”  
The old sexton muttered sullenly. “If you did,

The worse for me, by all accounts. The lights  
Burned low. You caught the firelight on my fist.  
What was it like, this ring?"

"A band of gold,  
And a great ruby, heart-shaped, fit to burn  
Between the breasts of Laïs. Am I awake  
Or dreaming?"

"Well,—that makes the second time!  
There's many have said they saw it, out of jest,  
To scare me. For the astrologer did say  
The third time I should die. Now, did you see it?  
Most likely someone's told you that old tale!  
You hadn't heard it, now?"

Ford shook his head.

"What tale?" said Ben.

"O, you could make a book  
About my life. I've talked with quick and dead,  
And neither ghost nor flesh can fright me now!  
I wish it was a ring, so's I could catch him,  
And sell him; but I've never seen him yet.  
A white witch told me, if I did, I'd go  
Clink, just like that, to heaven or t'other place,  
Whirled in a fiery chariot with ten steeds  
The way Elijah went. For I have seen  
So many mighty things that I must die  
Mightily.

Well,—I came, sirs, to my craft  
The day mine uncle Robert dug the grave  
For good Queen Katharine, she whose heart was broke  
By old King Harry, a very great while ago.  
Maybe you've heard about my uncle, sirs?  
He was far-famous for his grave-digging.  
In depth, in speed, in neatness, he'd no match!  
They've put a fine slab to his memory  
In Peterborough Cathedral—*Robert Scarlet,*  
*Sexton for half a century*, it says,  
*In Peterborough Cathedral, where he built*  
*The last sad habitation for two queens,*  
*And many hundreds of the common sort.*  
*And now himself, who for so many built*  
*Eternal habitations, others have buried.*

*Obiit anno aetatis, ninety-eight,  
July the second, fifteen ninety-four.*

We should do well, sir, with a slab like that,  
Shouldn't we?" And the sexton leered at Lodge.  
"Not many boasts a finer slab than that.  
There's many a king done worse. Ah, well, you see,  
He'd a fine record. Living to ninety-eight,  
He buried generations of the poor,  
A countless host, and thought no more of it  
Than digging potatoes. He'd a lofty mind  
That found no satisfaction in small deeds.  
But from his burying of two queens he drew  
A lively pleasure. Could he have buried a third,  
It would indeed have crowned his old white hairs.  
But he was famous, and he thought, perchance,  
A third were mere vain-glory. So he died.  
I helped him with the second."

The old man leered  
To see the shaft go home.

Ben filled the stoup  
With ale. "So that," quoth he, "began the tale  
About this ruby ring?" "But who," said Lodge,  
"Who was the second queen?"

"A famous queen,  
And a great lover! When you hear her name,  
Your hearts will leap. Her beauty passed the bounds  
Of modesty, men say, yet—she died young!  
We buried her at midnight. There were few  
That knew it; for the high State Funeral  
Was held upon the morrow, Lammes morn.  
Anon you shall hear why. A strange thing that,—  
To see the mourners weeping round a hearse  
That held a dummy coffin. Stranger still  
To see us lowering the true coffin down  
By torchlight, with some few of her true friends,  
In Peterborough Cathedral, all alone."

"Old as the world," said Ford. "It is the way  
Of princes. Their true tears and smiles are seen  
At dead of night, like ghosts raised from the grave!  
And all the luxury of their brief, bright noon,  
Cloaks but a dummy throne, a mask of life;

And, at the last, drapes a false catafalque,  
Holding a vacant urn, a mask of death.  
But tell, tell on!"

The sexton took a draught  
Of ale and smacked his lips.

"Mine uncle lived  
A mile or more from Peterborough, then.  
And, past his cottage, in the dead of night,  
Her royal coach came creeping through the lanes,  
With scutcheons round it and no crowd to see,  
And heralds carrying torches in their hands,  
And none to admire, but him and me, and one,  
A pedlar-poet, who lodged with us that week  
And paid his lodging with a bunch of rhymes.  
By these, he said, my uncle Robert's fame  
Should live, as in a picture, till the crack  
Of doom. My uncle thought that he should pay  
Four-pence beside; but, when the man declared  
The thought unworthy of these august events,  
My uncle was abashed.

And, truth to tell,  
The rhymes were mellow, though here and there he swerved  
From truth to make them so. Nor would he change  
'June' to 'July' for all that we could say.  
'I never said the month was June,' he cried,  
'And if I did, Shakespeare hath jumped an age!  
Gods, will you hedge me round with thirty nights?  
'June' rhymes with 'moon'!' With that, he flung them  
down  
And strode away like Lucifer, and was gone,  
Before old Scarlet could approach again  
The matter of that four-pence.

Yet his rhymes  
Have caught the very colours of that night!  
I can see through them,  
Ay, just as through our cottage window-panes,  
Can see the great black coach,  
Carrying the dead queen past our garden-gate.  
The roses bobbing and fluttering to and fro,  
Hide, and yet shew the more by hiding, half.  
And, like smoked glass through which you see the sun,

The song shows truest when it blurs the truth.  
This is the way it goes."

He rose to his feet,  
Picked up his spade, and struck an attitude,  
Leaning upon it. "I've got to feel my spade,  
Or I'll forget it. This is the way I speak it.  
Always." And, with a schoolboy's rigid face,  
And eyes fixed on the rafters, he began,  
Sing-song, the pedlar-poet's bunch of rhymes:—

As I went by the cattle-shed  
The grey dew dimmed the grass,  
And, under a twisted apple-tree,  
Old Robin Scarlet stood by me.  
"Keep watch! Keep watch to-night," he said,  
"There's things 'ull come to pass.

"Keep watch until the moon has cleared  
The thatch of yonder rick;  
Then I'll come out of my cottage-door  
To wait for the coach of a queen once more;  
And—you'll say nothing of what you've heard,  
But rise and follow me quick."

"And what 'ull I see if I keep your trust,  
And wait and watch so late?"  
"Pride," he said, "and Pomp," he said,  
"Beauty to haunt you till you're dead,  
And Glorious Dust that goes to dust,  
Passing the white farm-gate.

"You are young and all for adventure, lad,  
And the great tales to be told:  
This night, before the clock strike one,  
Your lordliest hour will all be done;  
But you'll remember it and be glad,  
In the days when you are old!"

All in the middle of the night,  
My face was at the pane;  
When, creeping out of his cottage-door,  
To wait for the coach of a queen once more,  
Old Scarlet, in the moon-light,  
Beckoned to me again.

He stood beneath a lilac-spray,  
Like Father Time for dole,  
In Reading Tawny cloak and hood,  
With mattock and with spade he stood,  
And, far away to southward,  
A bell began to toll.

He stood beneath a lilac-spray,  
And never a word he said;  
But, as I stole out of the house,  
He pointed over the orchard boughs,  
Where, not with dawn or sunset,  
The Northern sky grew red.

I followed him, and half in fear,  
To the old farm-gate again;  
And, round the curve of the long white road,  
I saw that the dew-dashed hedges glowed  
Red with the grandeur drawing near,  
And the torches of her train.

They carried her down with singing,  
With singing sweet and low,  
Slowly round the curve they came,  
Twenty torches dropping flame,  
The heralds that were bringing her  
The way we all must go.

'Twas master William Dethick,  
The Garter King of Arms,  
Before her royal coach did ride,  
With none to see his Coat of Pride,  
For peace was on the countryside,  
And sleep upon the farms;

Peace upon the red farm,  
Peace upon the grey,  
Peace on the heavy orchard trees,  
And little white-walled cottages,  
Peace upon the wayside,  
And sleep upon the way.

So master William Dethick,  
With forty horse and men,  
Like any common man and mean  
Rode on before the Queen, the Queen,  
And—only a wandering pedlar  
Could tell the tale again.

How, like a cloud of darkness,  
Between the torches moved  
Four black steeds and a velvet pall  
Crowned with the Crown Imperiall  
And—on her shield—the lilies,  
The lilies that she loved.

Ah, stained and ever stainless  
Ah, white as her own hand,  
White as the wonder of that brow,  
Crowned with colder lilies now,  
White on the velvet darkness,  
The lilies of her land!

The witch from over the water,  
The fay from over the foam,  
The bride that rode thro' Edinbro' town  
With satin shoes and a silken gown,  
A queen, and a great king's daughter,—  
Thus they carried her home,

With torches and with scutcheons,  
Unhonoured and unseen,  
With the lilies of France in the wind a-stir,  
And the Lion of Scotland over her,  
Darkly, in the dead of night,  
They carried the Queen, the Queen.

The sexton paused and took a draught of ale.  
"Twas there," he said, "I joined 'em at the gate,  
My uncle and the pedlar. What they sang,  
The little shadowy throng of men that walked  
Behind the scutcheoned coach with bare bent heads  
I know not; but 'twas very soft and low.  
They walked behind the rest, like shadows flung  
Behind the torch-light, from that strange dark hearse.  
And, some said, afterwards, they were the ghosts  
Of lovers that this queen had brought to death.  
A foolish thought it seemed to me, and yet  
Like the night-wind they sang. And there was one  
An olive-coloured man,—the pedlar said  
Was like a certain foreigner that she loved,  
One Chastelard, a wild French poet of hers.  
Also the pedlar thought they sang 'farewell'  
In words like this, and that the words in French  
Were written by the hapless Queen herself,  
When as a girl she left the vines of France  
For Scotland and the halls of Holyrood:—

## I

Though thy hands have plied their trade  
Eighty years without a rest,  
Robin Scarlet, never thy spade  
Built a house for such a guest!  
Carry her where, in earliest June,  
All the whitest hawthorns blow;  
Carry her under the midnight moon,  
Singing very soft and low.

Slow between the low green larches, carry the lovely lady  
sleeping,  
Past the low white moon-lit farms, along the lilac-shadowed  
way!  
Carry her through the summer darkness, weeping, weeping,  
weeping, weeping!  
Answering only, to any that ask you, whence ye carry her,—  
*Fotheringhay!*

## II

She was gayer than a child!  
 —*Let your torches droop for sorrow.*—  
 Laughter in her eyes ran wild!  
 —*Carry her down to Peterboro'.*—  
 Words were kisses in her mouth!  
 —*Let no word of blame be spoken.*—  
 She was Queen of all the South!  
 —*In the North, her heart was broken.*—

They should have left her in her vineyards, left her heart to her  
 land's own keeping,  
 Left her white breast room to breathe, and left her light foot  
 free to dance.  
 Out of the cold grey Northern mists, we carry her weeping,  
 weeping, weeping,—  
*O, ma patrie,*  
*La plus chérie,*  
*Adieu, plaisir pays de France!*

## III

Many a red heart died to beat  
 —*Music swelled in Holyrood!*—  
 Once, beneath her fair white feet.  
 —*Now the floors may rot with blood*—  
 She was young and her deep hair—  
 —*Wind and rain were all her fate!*—  
 Trapped young Love as in a snare.  
 —*And the wind's a sword in the Canongate!*  
*Edinboro'!*  
*Edinboro'!*

*Music built the towers of Troy, but thy grey walls are buitt  
 of sorrow!*  
 Wind-swept hills, and sorrowful glens, of thrifty sowing and  
 iron reaping,  
 What if her foot were fair as a sunbeam, how should it touch  
 or melt your snows?  
 What if her hair were a silken mesh?  
 Hands of steel can deal hard blows,  
 Iron breast-plates bruise fair flesh!

Carry her southward, palled in purple,  
Weeping, weeping, weeping,  
What had their rocks to do with roses? Body and soul she was  
all one rose.

Thus, through the summer night, slowly they went,  
We three behind,—the pedlar-poet and I,  
And Robin Scarlet. The moving flare that ringed  
The escutcheoned hearse, lit every leaf distinct  
Along the hedges and woke the sleeping birds,  
But drew no watchers from the drowsier farms.  
Thus, through a world of innocence and sleep,  
We brought her to the doors of her last home,  
In Peterborough Cathedral. Round her tomb  
They stood, in the huge gloom of those old aisles,  
The heralds with their torches, but their light  
Struggled in vain with that tremendous dark.  
Their ring of smoky red could only show  
A few sad faces round the purple pall,  
The wings of a stone angel overhead,  
The base of three great pillars, and, fitfully,  
Faint as the phosphorus glowing in some old vault,  
One little slab of marble, far away.

Yet, or the darkness, or the pedlar's words  
Had made me fanciful, I thought I saw  
Bowed shadows praying in those unplumbed aisles,  
Nay, dimly heard them weeping, in a grief  
That still was built of silence, like the drip  
Of water from a frozen fountain-head.

We laid her in her grave. We closed the tomb.  
With echoing footsteps all the funeral went;  
And I went last to close and lock the doors;  
Last, and half frightened of the enormous gloom  
That rolled along behind me as one by one  
The torches vanished. O, I was glad to see  
The moonlight on the kind turf-mounds again.

But, as I turned the key, a quivering hand  
Was laid upon my arm. I turned and saw  
That foreigner with the olive-coloured face.

From head to foot he shivered, as with cold.  
He drew me into the shadows of the porch.

'Come back with me,' he whispered, and slid his hand  
—Like ice it was!—along my wrist, and slipped  
A ring upon my finger, muttering quick,  
As in a burning fever, 'All the wealth  
Of Eldorado for one hour! Come back!  
I must go back and see her face again!  
I was not there, not there, the day she—died.  
You'll help me with the coffin. Not a soul  
Will know. Come back! One moment, only one!'

I thought the man was mad, and plucked my hand  
Away from him. He caught me by the sleeve,  
And sank upon his knees, lifting his face  
Most piteously to mine. 'One moment! See!  
I loved her!'  
I saw the moonlight glisten on his tears,  
Great, long, slow tears they were; and then—my God—  
As his face lifted and his head sank back  
Beseeching me—I saw a crimson thread  
Circling his throat, as though the headsman's axe  
Had cloven it with one blow, so shrewd, so keen,  
The head had slipped not from the trunk.

I gasped;  
And, as he pleaded, stretching his head back,  
The wound, O like a second awful mouth,  
The wound began to gape.

I tore my cloak  
Out of his clutch. My keys fell with a clash.  
I left them where they lay, and with a shout  
I dashed into the broad white empty road.  
There was no soul in sight. Sweating with fear  
I hastened home, not daring to look back;  
But as I turned the corner, I heard the clang  
Of those great doors, and knew he had entered in.

Not till I saw before me in the lane  
The pedlar and my uncle did I halt  
And look at that which clasped my finger still  
As with a band of ice.

My hand was bare!  
I stared at it and rubbed it. Then I thought  
I had been dreaming. There had been no ring!

The poor man I had left there in the porch,  
Being a Frenchman, talked a little wild;  
But only wished to look upon her grave.  
And I—I was the madman! So I said  
Nothing. But all the same, for all my thoughts,  
I'd not go back that night to find the keys,  
No, not for all the rubies in the crown  
Of Prester John.

The high State Funeral

Was held on Lammas Day. A wondrous sight  
For Peterborough! For myself, I found  
Small satisfaction in a catafalque  
That carried a dummy coffin. None the less,  
The pedlar thought that as a Solemn Masque,  
Or Piece of Purple Pomp, the thing was good,  
And worthy of a picture in his rhymes;  
The more because he said it shadowed forth  
The ironic face of Death.

The Masque, indeed

Began before we buried her. For a host  
Of Mourners—Lords and Ladies—on Lammas eve  
Panting with eagerness of pride and place,  
Arrived in readiness for the morrow's pomp,  
And at the Bishop's Palace they found prepared  
A mighty supper for them, where they sat  
All at one table. In a Chamber hung  
With scutcheons and black cloth, they drank red wine  
And feasted, while the torches and the Queen  
Crept through the darkness of Northampton lanes.

At seven o'clock on Lammas Morn they woke,  
After the Queen was buried; and at eight  
The Masque set forth, thus pictured in the rhymes  
With tolling bells, which on the pedlar's lips  
Had more than paid his lodging: Thus he spake it,  
Slowly, sounding the rhymes like solemn bells,  
And tolling, in between, with lingering tongue:—

*Toll!*—From the Palace the Releevants creep,—  
 A hundred poor old women, nigh their end,  
 Wearing their black cloth gowns, and on each head  
 An ell of snow-white holland which, some said,  
 Afterwards they might keep,  
*—Ah, Toll!*—with nine new shillings each to spend,  
 For all the trouble that they had, and all  
 The sorrow of walking to this funeral.

*Toll!*—And the Mourning Cloaks in purple streamed  
 Following, a long procession, two by two,  
 Her Household first. With these, Monsieur du Preau  
 Her French Confessor, unafraid to show  
 The golden Cross that gleamed  
 About his neck, warned what the crowd might do  
 Said *I will wear it, though I die for it!*  
 So subtle in malice was that Jesuit.

*Toll!*—Sir George Savile in his Mourner's Gown  
 Carried the solemn Cross upon a Field  
 Azure, and under it by a streamer borne  
 Upon a field of Gules, an Unicorn  
 Argent and, lower down,  
 A scrolled device upon a blazoned shield,  
 Which seemed to say—I AM SILENT TILL THE END!—  
*Toll! Toll!*—IN MY DEFENCE, GOD ME DEFEND!

*Toll!*—and a hundred poor old men went by,  
 Followed by two great Bishops.—*Toll, ah toll!*—  
 Then, with White Staves and Gowns, four noble lords;  
 Then sixteen Scots and Frenchmen with drawn swords;  
 Then, with a Bannerol,  
 Sir Andrew Noel, lifting to the sky  
 The Great Red Lion. Then the Crown and Crest  
 Borne by a Herald on his glittering breast.

And now—ah now, indeed, the deep bell tolls—  
 That empty Coffin, with its velvet pall,  
 Borne by six Gentlemen, under a canopy  
 Of purple, lifted by four knights, goes by.

## The Crown Imperial

**Burns** on the Coffin-head. Four Bannerols

On either side, uplifted by four squires,

Roll on the wind their rich heraldic fires.

*Toll!* The Chief Mourner—the fair Russell!—*toll!*—

Countess of Bedford—*toll!*—they bring her now,

Weeping under a purple Cloth of State,

Till, halting there before the Minister Gate,

Having in her control

The fair White Staves of office, with a bow

She gives them to her two great Earls again,

Then sweeps them onward in her mournful train.

*Toll!* At the high Cathedral door the Quires

Meet them and lead them, singing all the while

A mighty *Miserere* for her soul!

Then, as the rolling organ—*toll, ah toll!*—

Floods every glimmering aisle

With ocean-thunders, all those knights and squires

Bring the false Coffin to the central nave

And set it in the Catafalque o'er her grave.

The Catafalque was made in Field-bed wise

Valanced with midnight purple, fringed with gold:

All the Chief Mourners on dark thrones were set

Within it, as jewels in some huge carcanet:

Above was this device

**IN MY DEFENCE, GOD ME DEFEND**, inscribed

Round the rich Arms of Scotland, as to say

“Man judged me. I abide the Judgment Day.”

The sexton paused anew. All looked at him,

And at his wrinkled, grim, earth-coloured hand, .

As if, in that dim light, beclouded now

With blue tobacco-smoke, they thought to see

The smouldering ruby again.

“Ye know,” he said,

“How master William Wickham preached that day?”

Ford nodded. “I have heard of it. He showed

Subtly, O very subtly, after his kind,

That the white Body of Beauty such as hers  
Was in itself Papistical, a feast,  
A fast, an incense, a burnt-offering,  
And an Abomination in the sight  
Of all true Protestants. Why, her very name  
Was Mary!"

"Ay, that's true, that's very true!"  
The sexton mused. "Now that's a strange deep thought!  
The Bishop missed a text in missing that.  
Her name, indeed, was Mary!"

"Did you find  
Your keys again?" "Ay, sir, I found them!" "Where?"  
"Strange you should ask me that! After the throng  
Departed, and the Nobles were at feast,  
All in the Bishop's Palace—a great feast  
And worthy of their sorrow—I came back  
Carrying my uncle's second bunch of keys  
To lock the doors and search, too, for mine own.  
'Twas growing dusk already, and as I thrust  
The key into the lock, the great grey porch  
Grew cold upon me, like a tomb.

I pushed  
Hard at the key—then stopped—with all my flesh  
Freezing, and half in mind to fly; for, sirs,  
The door was locked already, and—from within!  
I drew the key forth quietly and stepped back  
Into the Churchyard, where the graves were warm  
With sunset still, and the blunt carven stones  
Lengthened their homely shadows, out and out,  
To Everlasting. Then I plucked up heart,  
Seeing the footprints of that mighty Masque  
Along the pebbled path. A queer thought came  
Into my head that all the world without  
Was but a Masque, and I was creeping back,  
Back from the Mourner's Feast to Truth again.  
Yet—I grew bold, and tried the Southern door.

'Twas locked, but held no key on the inner side  
To foil my own, and softly, softly, click,  
I turned it, and with heart, sirs, in my mouth,  
Pushed back the studded door and entered in . . .

Stepped straight out of the world, I might have said,

Out of the dusk into a night so deep,  
So dark, I trembled like a child. . . .

And then

I was aware, sirs, of a great sweet wave  
Of incense. All the gloom was heavy with it,  
As if her Papist Household had returned  
To pray for her poor soul; and, my fear went.  
But either that strange incense weighed me down,  
Or else from being sorely over-tasked,  
A languor came upon me, and sitting there  
To breathe a moment, in a velvet stall,  
I closed mine eyes.

A moment, and no more,

For then I heard a rustling in the nave,  
And opened them; and, very far away,  
As if across the world, in Rome herself,  
I saw twelve tapers in the solemn East,  
And saw, or thought I saw, cowled figures kneel  
Before them, in an incense-cloud.

And then,

Maybe the sunset deepened in the world  
Of masques without—clear proof that I had closed  
Mine eyes but for a moment, sirs, I saw  
As if across a world-without-end tomb,  
A tiny jewelled glow of crimson panes  
Darkening and brightening with the West.

And then,

Then I saw something more—Queen Mary's vault,  
And—it was open! . . .

Then, I heard a voice,  
A strange deep broken voice, whispering love  
In soft French words, that clasped and clung like hands;  
And then—two shadows passed against the West,  
Two blurs of black against that crimson stain,  
Slowly, O very slowly, with bowed heads,  
Leaning together, and vanished into the dark  
Beyond the Catafalque.

Then—I heard him pray,—  
And knew him for the man that prayed to me,—  
Pray as a man prays for his love's last breath!  
And then, O sirs, it caught me by the throat,

And I, too, dropped upon my knees and prayed;  
For, as in answer to his prayer, there came  
A moan of music, a mighty shuddering sound  
From the great organ, a sound that rose and fell  
Like seas in anger, very far away;  
And then a peal of thunder, and then it seemed,  
As if the graves were giving up their dead,  
A great cowled host of shadows rose and sang:—

*Dies iræ, dies illâ  
Solvit sæclum in favilla,  
Teste David cum Sibylla.*

I heard her sad, sad, little, broken voice,  
Out in the darkness. ‘Ay, and David, too,  
His blood is on the floors of Holyrood,  
To speak for me.’ Then that great ocean-sound  
Swelled to a thunder again, and heaven and earth  
Shrivelled away; and in that huge slow hymn  
Chariots were driven forth in flaming rows,  
And terrible trumpets blown from deep to deep.

And then, ah then, the heart of heaven was hushed,  
And—in the hush—it seemed an angel wept,  
Another Mary wept, and gathering up  
All our poor wounded, weary, way-worn world,  
Even as a Mother gathers up her babe,  
Soothed it against her breast, and rained her tears  
On the pierced feet of God, and melted Him  
To pity, and over His feet poured her deep hair.  
The music died away. The shadows knelt.  
And then—I heard a rustling nigh the tomb,  
And heard—and heard—or dreamed I heard—farewells,  
Farewells for everlasting, deep farewells,  
Bitter as blood, darker than any death.  
And, at the last, as in a kiss, one breath,  
One agony of sweetness, like a sword  
For sharpness, drawn along a soft white throat:  
And, for its terrible sweetness, like a sigh  
Across great waters, very far away,—  
*Sweetheart!*

And then, like doors, like world-without-end doors  
That shut for Everlasting, came a clang,  
And ringing, echoing, through the echo of it,  
One terrible cry that plucked my heart-strings out,  
*Mary!* And on the closed and silent tomb,  
Where there were two, one shuddering shadow lay,  
And then—I, too,—reeled, swooned and knew no more.

Sirs, when I woke, there was a broad bright shaft  
Of moonlight, slanting through an Eastern pane  
Full on her tomb and that black Catafalque.  
And on the tomb there lay—my bunch of keys!  
I struggled to my feet,  
Ashamed of my wild fancies, like a man  
Awakening from a drunken dream. And yet,  
When I picked up the keys, although that storm  
Of terror had all blown by and left me calm,  
I lifted up mine eyes to see the scroll  
Round the rich crest of that dark canopy,  
**IN MY DEFENCE, GOD ME DEFEND.** The moon  
Struck full upon it; and, as I turned and went,  
God help me, sirs, though I were loyal enough  
To good Queen Bess, I could not help but say,  
*Amen!*

And yet, methought it was not I that spake,  
But some deep soul that used me for a mask,  
A soul that rose up in this hollow shell  
Like dark sea-tides flooding an empty cave.  
I could not help but say with my poor lips,  
*Amen! Amen!*

Sirs, 'tis a terrible thing  
To move in great events. Since that strange night  
I have not been as other men. The tides  
Would rise in this dark cave”—he tapped his skull—  
“Deep tides, I know not whence; and when they rose  
My friends looked strangely upon me and stood aloof.  
And once, my uncle said to me—in fact,  
It troubled me strangely,—‘Timothy,’ he said,  
‘Thou art translated! I could well believe  
Thou art two men, whereof the one’s a fool,  
The other a prophet. Or else, beneath thy skin

There lurks a changeling! What hath come to thee?"  
 And then, sirs, then—well I remember it!  
 'Twas on a summer eve, and we walked home  
 Between high ghostly hedges white with may—  
 And uncle Robin, in his holy-day suit  
 Of Reading Tawny, felt his old heart swell  
 With pride in his great memories. He began  
 Chanting the pedlar's tune, keeping the time  
 Thus, jingle, jingle, slowly, with his keys:—

## I

Douglas, in the moonless night  
 —*Muffled oars on blue Loch Leven!*—  
 Took her hand, a flake of white  
 —*Beauty slides the bolts of heaven!*—  
 Little white hand, like a flake of snow,  
 When they saw it, his Highland crew  
 Swung together and murmured low,  
 "Douglas, wilt thou die then, too?"  
 And the pine trees whispered, weeping,  
 "Douglas, Douglas, tender and true!"  
 Little white hand like a tender moonbeam, soon shall you  
 set the broadswords leaping.  
 It is the Queen, the Queen!" they whispered, watching  
 her soar to the saddle anew.  
 "There will be trumpets blown in the mountains, a mist  
 of blood on the heather, and weeping,  
 Weeping, weeping, and thou, too, dead for her, Douglas,  
 Douglas, tender and true."

## II

Carry the queenly lass along!  
 —*Cold she lies, cold and dead,*—  
 She whose laughter was a song,  
 —*Lapped around with sheets of lead!*—  
 She whose blood was wine of the South,  
 —*Light her down to a couch of clay!*—  
 And a royal rose her mouth,  
 And her body made of may!

—Lift your torches, weeping, weeping,  
Light her down to a couch of clay.

They should have left her in her vineyards, left her heart  
to her land's own keeping,  
Left her white breast room to breathe, and left her light  
foot free to dance!

Hush! Between the solemn pinewoods, carry the lovely lady  
sleeping,  
Out of the cold grey Northern mists, with banner and  
scutcheon, plume, and lance,  
Carry her southward, palled in purple, weeping, weeping,  
weeping, weeping,—  
*O, ma patrie,*  
*La plus chérie,*  
*Adieu, plaisir pays de France!*

Well, sirs, that dark tide rose within my brain!  
I snatched his keys and flung them over the hedge,  
Then flung myself down on a bank of ferns  
And wept and wept and wept.

It puzzled him.

Perchance he feared my mind was going and yet,  
O, sirs, if you consider it rightly now,  
With all those ages knocking at his doors,  
With all that custom clamouring for his care,  
Is it so strange a grave-digger should weep?  
Well—he was kind enough and heaped my plate  
That night at supper.  
But I could never dig my graves at ease  
In Peterborough Churchyard. So I came  
To London—to St. Mary Magdalen's.  
And thus, I chanced to drink my ale one night  
Here in the Mermaid Inn. 'Twas All Souls' Eve,  
And, on that bench, where master Ford now sits  
Was master Shakespeare—  
Well, the lights burned low,  
And just like master Ford to-night he leaned  
Suddenly forward. 'Timothy,' he said,  
'That's a most marvellous ruby!'

My blood frozel

I stretched my hand out bare as it was born;  
And he said nothing, only looked at me.  
Then, seeing my pipe was empty, he bade me fill  
And lit it for me.

Peach, the astrologer,  
Was living then; and that same night I went  
And told him all my trouble about this ring.  
He took my hand in his, and held it—thus—  
Then looked into my face and said this rhyme:—

*The ruby ring, that only three  
While Time and Tide go by, shall see,  
Weds your hand to history.*

*Honour and pride the first shall lend;  
The second shall give you gold to spend;  
The third—shall warn you of your end.*

Peach was a rogue, some say, and yet he spake  
Most truly about the first," the sexton mused,  
"For master Shakespeare, though they say in youth  
Outside the theatres, he would hold your horse  
For pence, prospered at last, bought a fine house  
In Stratford, lived there like a squire, they say.  
And here, here he would sit, for all the world  
As he were but a poet! God bless us all,  
And then—to think!—he rose to be a squire!  
A deep one, masters! Well, he lit my pipe!"  
"Why did they bury such a queen by night?"  
Said Ford. "Kings might have wept for her. Did Death  
Play epicure and glutton that so few  
Were bidden to such a feast. Once on a time,  
I could have wept, myself, to hear a tale  
Of beauty buried in the dark. And hers  
Was loveliness, far, far beyond the common!  
Such beauty should be marble to the touch  
Of time, and clad in purple to amaze  
The moth. But she was kind and soft and fair,  
A woman, and so she died. But, why the dark?"

"Sir, they gave out the coffin was too heavy  
 For gentlemen to bear!"—"For kings to bear?"  
 Ford flashed at him. The sexton shook his head,—  
 "Nay! Gentlemen to bear! But—the true cause—  
 Ah, sir, 'tis unbelievable, even to me,  
 A sexton, for a queen so fair of face!  
 And all her beds, even as the pedlar said,  
 Breathing Arabia, sirs, her walls all hung  
 With woven purple wonders and great tales  
 Of amorous gods, and mighty mirrors, too,  
 Imaging her own softness, night and dawn,  
 When through her sumptuous hair she drew the combs;  
 And like one great white rose-leaf half her breast  
 Shone through it, firm as ivory."

"Ay," said Lodge,  
 Murmuring his own rich music under breath,  
*"About her neck did all the graces throng,  
 And lay such baits as did entangle death."*  
 "Well, sir, the weather being hot, they feared  
 She would not hold the burying!" . . .

"In some sort,"

Ford answered slowly, "if your tale be true,  
 She did not hold it. Many a knightly crest  
 Will bend yet o'er the ghost of that small hand."

There was a hush, broken by Ben at last,  
 Who turned to Ford—"How now, my golden lad?  
 The astrologer's dead hand is on thy purse!"

Ford laughed, grimly, and flung an angel down.  
 "Well, cause or consequence, rhyme or no rhyme,  
 There is thy gold. I will not break the spell,  
 Or thou mayst live to bury us one and all!"

"And, if I live so long," the old man replied,  
 Lighting his lanthorn, "you may trust me, sirs,  
 Mine Inn is quiet, and I can find you beds  
 Where Queens might sleep all night and never move.  
 Good-night, sirs, and God bless you, one and all."

He shouldered pick and spade. I opened the door.  
 The snow blew in, and, as he shuffled out,  
 There, in the strait dark passage, I could swear

I saw a spark of red upon his hand,  
Like a great smouldering ruby.

I gasped. He stopped.

He peered at me.

"Twice in a night," he said.

"Nothing," I answered, "only the lanthorn-light."  
He shook his head. "I'll tell you something more!  
There's nothing, nothing now in life or death  
That frightens me. Ah, things used to frighten me.  
But never now. I thought I had ten years;  
But if the warning comes and says '*'Thou fool,*  
*This night!*' Why, then, I'm ready."

I watched him go,  
With glimmering lanthorn up the narrow street,  
Like one that walked upon the clouds, through snow  
That seemed to mix the City with the skies.

On Christmas Eve we heard that he was dead.

## VIII

### FLOS MERCATORUM

FLOS MERCATORUM! On that night of nights  
We drew from out our Mermaid cellarage  
All the old glory of London in one cask  
Of magic vintage. Never a city on earth—  
Rome, Paris, Florence, Bagdad—held for Ben  
The colours of old London; and, that night,  
We staved them like a wine, and drank, drank deep!

'Twas Master Heywood, whom the Mermaid Inn  
Had dubbed our London laureate, hauled the cask  
Out of its ancient harbourage. "Ben," he cried,  
Bustling into the room with Dekker and Brome,  
"The prentices are up!" Ben raised his head  
Out of the chimney-corner where he drowsed,  
And listened, reaching slowly for his pipe.

*"Clerk of the Bow Bell,"* all along the Cheape  
There came a shout that swelled into a roar.

"What! Will they storm the Mermaid?" Heywood  
laughed,  
"They are turning into Bread Street!"

Down they came!

We heard them hooting round the poor old Clerk—  
"Clubs! Clubs! The rogue would have us work all night!  
He rang ten minutes late! Fifteen, by Paul's!"  
And over the hubbub rose, like a thin bell,  
The Clerk's entreaty—"Now, good boys, good boys,  
Children of Cheape, be still, I do beseech you!  
I took some forty winks, but then . . ." A roar  
Of wrathful laughter drowned him—"Forty winks!  
Remember Black May-day! We'll make you wink!"  
There was a scuffle, and into the tavern rushed  
Gregory Clopton, Clerk of the Bow Bell,—  
A tall thin man, with yellow hair a-stream,  
And blazing eyes.

"Hide me," he clamoured, "quick!  
These picaroons will murder me!"

I closed

The thick oak doors against the coloured storm  
Of prentices in red and green and ray,  
Saffron and Reading tawny. Twenty clubs  
Drubbed on the panels as I barred them out;  
And even our walls and shutters could not drown  
Their song that, like a mocking peal of bells,  
Under our windows, made all Bread Street ring:—

*"Clerk of the Bow Bell,  
With the yellow locks,  
For thy late ringing  
Thy head shall have knocks!"*

Then Heywood, seeing the Clerk was all a-quake,  
Went to an upper casement that o'er-looked  
The whole of Bread Street. Heywood knew their ways,  
And parleyed with them till their anger turned  
To shouts of merriment. Then, like one deep bell  
His voice rang out, in answer to their peal:—

*"Children of Cheape,  
Hold you all still!  
You shall have Bow Bell  
Rung at your will!"*

Loudly they cheered him. Courteously he bowed,  
Then firmly shut the window; and, ere I filled  
His cup with sack again, the crowd had gone.

"My clochard, sirs, is warm," quavered the Clerk.  
"I do confess I took some forty winks!  
They are good lads, our prentices of Cheape,  
But hasty!"

"Wine!" said Ben. He filled a cup  
And thrust it into Gregory's trembling hands.  
"Yours is a task," said Dekker, "a great task!  
You sit among the gods, a lord of time,  
Measuring out the pulse of London's heart."

"Yea, sir, above the hours and days and years,  
I sometimes think. 'Tis a great Bell—the Bow!  
And hath been, since the days of Whittington."

"The good old days," growled Ben. "Both good and bad  
Were measured by my Bell," the Clerk replied.  
And, while he spoke, warmed by the wine, his voice  
Mellowed and floated up and down the scale  
As if the music of the London bells  
Lingered upon his tongue. "I know them all,  
And love them, all the voices of the bells.

FLOS MERCATORUM! That's the Bell of Bow  
Remembering Richard Whittington. You should hear  
The bells of London when they tell his tale.  
Once, after hearing them, I wrote it down.  
I know the tale by heart now, every turn."

"Then ring it out," said Heywood.

Gregory smiled  
And cleared his throat.

"You must imagine, sirs,  
The Clerk, sitting on high, among the clouds,  
With London spread beneath him like a map.

Under his tower, a flock of prentices  
 Calling like bells, of little size or weight,  
 But bells no less, ask that the Bell of Bow  
 Shall tell the tale of Richard Whittington,  
 As thus."

Then Gregory Clopton, mellowing all  
 The chiming vowels, and dwelling on every tone  
 In rhythm or rhyme that helped to swell the peal  
 Or keep the ringing measure, beat for beat,  
 Chanted this legend of the London bells:—

Clerk of the Bow Bell, four and twenty prentices,  
 All upon a Hallowe'en, we prithee, for our joy,  
 Ring a little turn again for sweet Dick Whittington,  
*Flos Mercatorum*, and a barefoot boy!—

"Children of Cheape," did that old Clerk answer,  
 "You will have a peal, then, for well may you know,  
 All the bells of London remember Richard Whittington  
 When they hear the voice of the big Bell of Bow!"—

Clerk with the yellow locks, mellow be thy malmsey!  
 He was once a prentice, and carolled in the Strand!  
 Ay, and we are all, too, Marchaunt Adventurers,  
 Prentices of London, and lords of Engeland.

"Children of Cheape," did that old Clerk answer,  
 "Hold you, ah hold you, ah hold you all still!  
 Souling if you come to the glory of a Prentice,  
 You shall have the Bow Bell rung at your will!"

"Whittington! Whittington! O, turn again, Whittington,  
 Lord Mayor of London," the big Bell began:  
 "Where was he born? O, at Pauntley in Gloucestershire  
 Hard by Cold Ashton, Cold Ashton," it ran.

"*Flos Mercatorum*," moaned the bell of All Hallowes,  
 "There was he an orphan, O, a little lad alone!"  
 "Then we all sang," echoed happy St. Saviour's,  
 "Called him, and lured him, and made him our own.

Told him a tale as he lay upon the hillside,  
 Looking on his home in the meadow-lands below!"  
 "Told him a tale," clanged the bell of Cold Abbey;  
 "Told him the truth," boomed the big Bell of Bow!

Sang of a City that was like a blazoned missal-book,  
 Black with oaken gables, carven and inscribed;  
 Every street a coloured page, and every sign a hieroglyph,  
 Dusky with enchantments, a City paved with gold;

"Younger son, younger son, up with stick and bundle!"—  
 Even so we rung for him—"But—kneel before you go;  
 Watch by your shield, lad, in little Pauntley Chancel,  
 Look upon the painted panes that hold your Arms a-glow,—

Coat of Gules and Azure; but the proud will not remember it!  
 And the Crest a Lion's Head, until the new be won!  
 Far away, remember it! And O, remember this, too,—  
 Every barefoot boy on earth is but a younger son."

Proudly he answered us, beneath the painted window,—  
 "Though I be a younger son, the glory falls to me:  
 While my brother bideth by a little land in Gloucestershire,  
 All the open Earth is mine, and all the Ocean-sea.

Yet will I remember, yet will I remember,  
 By the chivalry of God, until my day be done,  
 When I meet a gentle heart, lonely and unshielded,  
 Every barefoot boy on earth is but a younger son!"

Then he looked to Northward for the tall ships of Bristol;  
 Far away, and cold as death, he saw the Severn shine:  
 Then he looked to Eastward, and he saw a string of colours  
 Trickling through the grey hills, like elfin drops of wine;

Down along the Mendip dale, the chapmen and their horses,  
 Far away, and carrying each its little coloured load,  
 Winding like a fairy-tale, with pack and corded bundle,  
 Trickled like a crimson thread along the silver road.

Quick he ran to meet them, stick and bundle on his shoulder!

Over by Cold Ashton, he met them trampling down,—

White shaggy horses with their packs of purple spicery,

Crimson kegs of malmsey, and the silks of London town.

When the chapmen asked of him the bridle-path to Dorset,

Blithely he showed them, and he led them on their way,  
Led them through the fern with their bales of breathing  
Araby,

Led them to a bridle-path that saved them half a day.

Merrily shook the silver bells that hung the broidered bridle-rein,

Chiming to his hand, as he led them through the fern,  
Down to deep Dorset, and the wooded Isle of Purbeck,  
Then—by little Kimmeridge—they led him turn for turn.

Down by little Kimmeridge, and up by Hampshire forest-roads,

Round by Sussex violets, and apple-bloom of Kent,  
Singing songs of London, telling tales of London,

All the way to London, with packs of wool they went.

“London was London, then! A clean, clear moat  
Girdled her walls that measured, round about,  
Three miles or less. She is big and dirty now,”  
Said Dekker.

“Call it a silver moat,” growled Ben,  
“That’s the new poetry! Call it crystal, lad!  
But, till you kiss the Beast, you’ll never find  
Your Fairy Prince. Why, all those crowded streets,  
Flung all their filth, their refuse, rags and bones,  
Dead cats and dogs, into your clean clear moat,  
And made it sluggish as old Acheron.  
Fevers and plagues, death in a thousand shapes  
Crawled out of it. London was dirty, lad;  
And till you kiss that fact, you’ll never see  
The glory of this old Jerusalem!”

“Ay, ‘tis the fogs that make the sunset red,”  
Answered Tom Heywood. “London is earthy, coarse,  
Grimy and grand. You must make dirt the ground,

Or lose the colours of friend Clopton's tale.  
Ring on!" And, nothing loth, the Clerk resumed:—

Bravely swelled his heart to see the moat of London glittering  
Round her mighty wall—they told him—two miles long!  
Then—he gasped as, echoing in by grim black Aldgate,  
Suddenly their shaggy nags were nodding through a  
throng:

Prentices in red and ray, marchaunts in their saffron,  
Aldermen in violets, and minstrels in white,  
Clerks in homely hoods of budge, and wives with crimson  
wimples,  
Thronging as to welcome him that happy summer night.

"Back," they cried, and "Clear the way," and caught the  
ringing bridle-reins:  
"Wait! the Watch is going by, this vigil of St. John!"  
Merrily laughed the chapmen then, reining their great white  
horses back,  
"When the pageant passes, lad, we'll up and follow on!"

There, as thick the crowd surged, beneath the blossomed ale-  
poles,  
Lifting up to Whittington a fair face afraid,  
Swept against his horse by a billow of madcap prentices,  
Hard against the stirrup breathed a green-gowned maid.

Swift he drew her up and up, and throned her there before  
him,  
High above the throng with her laughing April eyes,  
Like a Queen of Faërie on the great pack-saddle.  
"Hey!" laughed the chapmen, "the prentice wins the prize!"

"Whittington! Whittington! the world is all before you!"  
Blithely rang the bells and the steeples rocked and reeled!  
Then—he saw her eyes grow wide, and, all along by Leaden  
Hall,  
Drums rolled, earth shook, and shattering trumpets pealed.

Like a marching sunset, there, from Leaden Hall to Aldgate,  
 Flared the crimson cressets—O, her brows were haloed  
 then!—

Then the stirring steeds went by with all their mounted  
 trumpeters,  
 Then, in ringing harness, a thousand marching men.

Marching—marching—his heart and all the halberdiers,  
 And his pulses throbbing with the throbbing of the drums;  
 Marching—marching—his blood and all the burganets!  
 “Look,” she cried, “O, look,” she cried, “and now the morrice  
 comes!”

Dancing—dancing—her eyes and all the Lincoln Green,  
 Robin Hood and Friar Tuck, dancing through the town!  
 “Where is Marian?” Laughingly she turned to Richard  
 Whittington.  
 “Here,” he said, and pointed to her own green gown.

Dancing—dancing—her heart and all the morrice-bells!  
 Then there burst a mighty shout from thrice a thousand  
 throats!  
 Then, with all their bows bent, and sheaves of peacock arrows,  
 Marched the tall archers in their white silk coats,

White silk coats, with the crest of London City  
 Crimson on the shoulder, a sign for all to read,—  
 Marching—marching—and then the sworded henchmen,  
 Then, William Walworth, on his great stirring steed.

*Flos Mercatorum*, ay, the fish-monger, Walworth,—  
 He whose nets of silk drew the silver from the tide,  
 He who saved the king when the king was but a prentice,—  
 Lord Mayor of London, with his sword at his side!

Burned with magic changes, his blood and all the pageantry;  
 Burned with deep sea-changes, the wonder in her eyes;  
*Flos Mercatorum!* ’Twas the rose-mary of Paphos,  
 Reddening all the City for the prentice and his prize!

All the book of London, the pages of adventure,  
 Passed before the prentice on that vigil of St. John:  
 Then the chapmen shook their reins,—“We'll ride behind the  
 revelry,  
 Round again to Cornhill! Up, and follow on!”

Riding on his pack-horse, above the shouting multitude,  
 There she turned and smiled at him, and thanked him for his  
 grace:  
 “Let me down by *Red Rose Lane*,” and, like a wave of twilight  
 While she spoke, her shadowy hair—touched his tingling  
 face.

When they came to *Red Rose Lane*, beneath the blossomed ale-  
 poles,  
 Light along his arm she lay, a moment, leaping down:  
 Then she waved “farewell” to him, and down the Lane he  
 watched her  
 Flitting through the darkness in her gay green gown.

All along the Cheape, as he rode among the chapmen,  
 Round by *Black Friars*, to the *Two-Necked Swan*  
 Coloured like the sunset, prentices and maidens  
 Danced for red roses on the vigil of St. John.

Over them were jewelled lamps in great black galleries,  
 Garlanded with beauty, and burning all the night;  
 All the doors were shadowy with orpin and St. John's wort,  
 Long fennel, green birch, and lilies of delight.

“He should have slept here at the Mermaid Inn,”  
 Said Heywood as the chanter paused for breath.  
 “What? Has our Mermaid sung so long?” cried Ben.  
 “Her beams are black enough. There was an Inn,”  
 Said Tom, “that bore the name; and through its heart  
 There flowed the right old purple. I like to think  
 It was the same, where Lydgate took his ease  
 After his hood was stolen; and Gower, perchance;  
 And, though he loved the *Tabard* for a-while,  
 I like to think the Father of us all,

The old Adam of English minstrelsy caroused  
 Here in the Mermaid Tavern. I like to think  
 Jolly Dan Chaucer, with his kind shrewd face  
 Fresh as an apple above his fur-fringed gown,  
 One plump hand sporting with his golden chain,  
 Looked out from that old casement over the sign,  
 And saw the pageant, and the shaggy nags,  
 With Whittington, and his green-gowned maid, go by.

“O, very like,” said Clopton, “for the bells  
 Left not a head indoors that night.” He drank  
 A draught of malmsey—and thus renewed his tale:—

“*Flos Mercatorum*,” mourned the bell of All Hallowes,

“There was he an orphan, O, a little lad alone,  
 Rubbing down the great white horses for a supper!”  
 “True,” boomed the Bow Bell, “his hands were his own!”

Where did he sleep? On a plump white wool-pack,  
 Open to the moon on that vigil of St. John,  
 Sheltered from the dew, where the black-timbered gallery  
 Frowned above the yard of the *Two-Necked Swan*.

Early in the morning, clanged the bell of St. Martin’s,  
 Early in the morning, with a groat in his hand,  
 Mournfully he parted with the jolly-hearted chapmen,  
 Shouldered his bundle and walked into the *Strand*;

Walked into the *Strand*, and back again to *West Cheape*,  
 Staring at the wizardry of every painted sign,  
 Dazed with the steeples and the rich heraldic cornices  
 Drinking in the colours of the Cheape like wine.

All about the booths now, the parti-coloured prentices  
 Fluted like a flock of birds along a summer lane,  
 Green linnets, red caps, and gay gold finches,—  
*What d'ye lack, and what d'ye lack, and what d'ye lack again?*

"Buy my dainty doublets, cut on double taffetas,  
 Buy my Paris thread," they cried, and caught him by the hand,  
 "Laces for your Heart's-Delight, and lawns to make her love  
 you,  
 Cambric for her wimple, O, the finest in the land."

Ah, but he was hungry, foot-sore, weary,  
 Knocking at the doors of the armourers that day!  
*What d'ye lack?* they asked of him; but no man lacked a prentice:  
 When he told them what he lacked, they frowned and turned away.

Hard was his bed that night, beneath a cruel archway,  
 Down among the hulks, with his heart growing cold!  
 London is a rare town, but O, the streets of London,  
 Red though their flints be, they are not red with gold.

Pale in the dawn, ere he marched on his adventure,  
 Starving for a crust, did he kneel a-while again,  
 Then, upon the fourth night, he cried, O, like a wounded bird  
 "Let me die, if die I must, in *Red Rose Lane.*"

Like a little wounded bird he trailed through the darkness,  
 Laid him on a door-step, and then—O, like a breath  
 Pitifully blowing out his life's little rushlight,  
 Came a gush of blackness, a swoon deep as death.

Then he heard a rough voice! Then he saw a lanthorn!  
 Then he saw a bearded face, and blindly wondered whose:  
 Then—a marchaunt's portly legs, with great Rose-Windows,  
 Bigger than St. Paul's, he thought, embroidered on his shoes.

"Alice!" roared the voice, and then, O like a lillied angel.  
 Leaning from the lighted door a fair face afraid,  
 Leaning over *Red Rose Lane*, O, leaning out of Paradise,  
 Drooped the sudden glory of his green-gowned maid!

"O, mellow be thy malmsey," grunted Ben,  
 Filling the Clerk another cup.

"The peal,"

Quoth Clopton, "is not ended, but the pause  
 In ringing, chimes to a deep inward ear  
 And tells its own deep tale. Silence and sound,  
 Darkness and light, mourning and mirth,—no tale,  
 No painting, and no music, nay, no world,  
 If God should cut their fruitful marriage-knot.  
 A shallow sort to-day would fain deny  
 A hell, sirs, to this boundless universe.  
 To such I say 'no hell, no Paradise!'  
 Others wculd fain deny the topless towers  
 Of heaven, and make this earth a hell indeed.  
 To such I say, 'the unplumbed gulfs of grief  
 Are only theirs for whom the blissful chimes  
 Ring from those unseen heights.' This earth, mid-way,  
 Hangs like a belfry where the ringers grasp  
 Their ropes in darkness, each in his own place,  
 Each knowing, by the tune in his own heart,  
 Never by sight, when he must toss through heaven  
 The tone of his own bell. Those bounded souls  
 Have never heard our chimes! Why, sirs, myself  
 Simply by running up and down the scale  
 Descend to hell or soar to heaven. My bells  
 Height above height, deep below deep, respond!  
 Their scale is infinite. Dare I, for one breath,  
 Dream that one note hath crowned and ended all,  
 Sudden I hear, far, far above those clouds,  
 Like laughing angels; peal on golden peal,  
 Innumerable as drops of April rain,  
 Yet every note distinct, round as a pearl,  
 And perfect in its place, a chime of law,  
 Whose pure and boundless mere arithmetic  
 Climbs with my soul to God."

Ben looked at him,  
 Gently. "Resume, old moralist," he said.  
 "On to thy marriage-bells!"

"The fairy-tales  
 Are wiser than they know, sirs. All our woes  
 Lead on to those celestial marriage-bells.  
 The world's a-wooing; and the pure City of God  
 Peals for the wedding of our joy and pain!

This was well seen of Richard Whittington;  
For only he that finds the London streets  
Paved with red flints, at last shall find them paved  
Like to the Perfect City, with pure gold.  
Ye know the world! what was a London waif  
To Hugh Fitzwarren's daughter? He was fed  
And harboured; and the cook declared she lacked  
A scullion. So, in Hugh Fitzwarren's house,  
He turned the jack, and scoured the dripping-pan.  
How could he hope for more?

This marchaunt's house

Was builded like a great high-gabled inn,  
Square, with a galleried courtyard, such as now  
The players use. Its rooms were rich and dim  
With deep-set coloured panes and massy beams.  
Its ancient eaves jutted o'er *Red Rose Lane*  
Darkly, like eyebrows of a mage asleep.  
Its oaken stair coiled upward through a dusk  
Heavy with fume of scented woods that burned  
To keep the Plague away,—a gloom to embalm  
A Pharaoh, but to dull the cheek and eye  
Of country lads like Whittington.

He pined

For wind and sunlight. Yet he plied his task  
Patient as in old tales of Elfin-land,  
The young knight would unhelm his golden locks  
And play the scullion, so that he might watch  
His lady's eyes unknown, and oftener hear  
Her brook-like laughter rippling overhead;  
Her green gown, like the breath of Eden boughs,  
Rustling nigh him. And all day long he found  
Sunshine enough in this. But when at night  
He crept into the low dark vaulted den,  
The cobwebbed cellar, where the cook had strewn  
The scullion's bed of straw (and none too thick  
Lest he should sleep too long), he choked for breath;  
And, like an old man hoarding up his life,  
Fostered his glimmering rushlight as he sate  
Bolt upright, while a horrible scurry heaved  
His rustling bed, and bright black-beaded eyes  
Peered at him from the crannies of the wall.

Then darkness whelmed him, and perchance he slept,—  
Only to fight with nightmares and to fly  
Down endless tunnels in a ghastly dream,  
Hunted by horrible human souls that took  
The shape of monstrous rats, great chattering snouts,  
Vile shapes of shadowy cunning and grey greed,  
That gnaw through beams, and undermine tall towns,  
And carry the seeds of plague and ruin and death  
Under the eareless homes of sleeping men.

Thus, in the darkness, did he wage a war  
With all the powers of darkness. ‘If the light  
Do break upon me, by the grace of God,’  
So did he vow, ‘O, then will I remember,  
Then, then, will I remember, ay, and help  
To build that lovelier City which is paved  
For rich and poor alike, with purest gold.’

Ah, sirs, he kept his vow. Ye will not smile  
If, at the first, the best that he could do  
Was with his first poor penny-piece to buy  
A cat, and bring her home, under his coat  
By stealth (or else that termagant, the cook,  
Had drowned it in the water-butt, nor deemed  
The water worse to drink). So did he quell  
First his own plague, but bettered others, too.  
Now, in those days, Marchaunt Adventurers  
Shared with their prentices the happy chance  
Of each new venture. Each might have his stake,  
Little or great, upon the glowing tides  
Of high romance that washed the wharfs of Thames;  
And every lad in London had his groat  
Or splendid shilling on some fair ship at sea.

So, on an April eve, Fitzwarren called  
His prentices together; for, ere long,  
The *Unicorn*, his tall new ship, must sail  
Beyond the world to gather gorgeous webs  
From Eastern looms, great miracles of silk  
Dipt in the dawn by wizard hands of Ind;  
Or, if they chanced upon that fabled coast  
Where Sydon, river of jewels, like a snake

Slides down the gorge its coils of crimson fire,  
 Perchance a richer cargo,—rubies, pearls,  
 Or gold bars from the Gates of Paradise.  
 And many a moon, at least, a faërie foam  
 Would lap Blackfriars wharf, where London lads  
 Gazed in the sunset down that misty reach  
 For old black battered hulks and tattered sails  
 Bringing their dreams home from the uncharted sea.

And one flung down a groat—he had no more.  
 One staked a shilling, one a good French crown;  
 And one an angel, O, light-winged enough  
 To reach Cathay; and not a lad but bought  
 His pennyworth of wonder,

So they thought,  
 Till all at once Fitzwarren's daughter cried  
 'Father, you have forgot poor Whittington!'  
 "Snails," laughed the rosy marchaunt, 'but that's true!  
 Fetch Whittington! The lad must stake his groat!  
 'Twill bring us luck!'

'Whittington! Whittington!'  
 Down the dark stair, like a gold-headed bird,  
 Fluttered sweet Alice. 'Whittington! Richard! Quick!  
 Quick with your groat now for the *Unicorn!*'

'A groat!' cried Whittington, standing there aghast,  
 With brown bare arms, still coloured by the sun,  
 Among his pots and pans. 'Where should I find  
 A groat? I staked my last groat in a cat!'  
 —'What! Have you nothing? Nothing but a cat?  
 Then stake the cat,' she said; and the quick fire  
 That in a woman's mind out-runs the thought  
 Of man, lit her grey eyes.

Whittington laughed  
 And opened the cellar-door. Out sailed his wealth,  
 Waving its tail, purring, and rubbing its head  
 Now on his boots, now on the dainty shoe  
 Of Alice, who straightway, deaf to his laughing prayers,  
 Caught up the cat, whispered it, hugged it close,  
 Against its grey fur leaned her glowing cheek,  
 And carried it off in triumph.

*Red Rose Lane*

Echoed with laughter as, with amber eyes  
 Blinking, the grey cat in a seaman's arms  
 Went to the wharf. 'Ay, but we need a cat,'  
 The captain said. So, when the painted ship  
 Sailed through a golden sunrise down the Thames,  
 A grey tail waved upon the misty poop,  
 And Whittington had his venture on the seas.

It was a nine days' jest, and soon forgot.  
 But, all that year,—ah, sirs, ye know the world,  
 For all the foolish boasting of the proud,  
 Looks not beneath the coat of Taunton serge  
 For Gules and Azure. A prince that comes in rags  
 To clean your shoes and, out of his own pride,  
 Waits for the world to paint his shield again  
 Must wait for ever and a day.

## The world

Is a great hypocrite, hypocrite most of all  
 When thus it boasts its purple pride of race,  
 Then with eyes blind to all but pride of place  
 Tramples the scullion's heraldry underfoot,  
 Nay, never sees it, never dreams of it,  
 Content to know that, here and now, his coat  
 Is greasy . . .

So did Whittington find at last  
 Such nearness was most distant; that to see her,  
 Talk with her, serve her thus, was but to lose  
 True sight, true hearing. He must save his life  
 By losing it; forsake, to win, his love;  
 Go out into the world to bring her home.  
 It was but labour lost to clean the shoes,  
 And turn the jack, and scour the dripping-pan.  
 For every scolding blown about her ears  
 The cook's great ladle fell upon the head  
 Of Whittington; who, beneath her rule, became  
 The scullery's general scapegoat. It was he  
 That burned the pie-crust, drank the hippocras,  
 Dinted the silver beaker. . . .

## Many a month

He chafed, till his resolve took sudden shape

And, out of the dark house at the peep of day,  
 Shouldering bundle and stick again, he stole  
 To seek his freedom, and to shake the dust  
 Of London from his shoes. . . .

You know the stone

On Highgate, where he sate awhile to rest,  
 With aching heart, and thought 'I shall not see  
 Her face again.' There, as the coloured dawn  
 Over the sleeping City slowly bloomed,  
 A small black battered ship with tattered sails  
 Blurring the burnished glamour of the Thames  
 Crept, side-long to a wharf.

Then, all at once,  
 The London bells rang out a welcome home;  
 And, over them all, tossing the tenor on high,  
 The Bell of Bow, a sun among the stars,  
 Flooded the morning air with this refrain:—

'Turn again, Whittington! Turn again, Whittington!  
*Flos Mercatorum*, thy ship hath come home!

Trailing from her cross-trees the crimson of the sunrise,  
 Dragging all the glory of the sunset thro' the foam.

Turn again, Whittington,

Turn again, Whittington,

Lord Mayor of London!

Turn again, Whittington! When thy hope was darkest,  
 Far beyond the sky-line a ship sailed for thee.

*Flos Mercatorum*, O, when thy faith was blindest,  
 Even then thy sails were set beyond the Ocean-sea.'

So he heard and heeded us, and turned again to London,  
 Stick and bundle on his back, he turned to *Red Rose Lane*,  
 Hardly hearing as he went the chatter of the prentices,—  
*What d'ye lack, and what d'ye lack, and what d'ye lack again?*

Back into the scullery, before the cook had missed him,  
 Early in the morning his labours he began:  
 Once again to clean the shoes and clatter with the water-pail.  
 Once again to scrub the jack and scour the dripping-pan.

All the bells of London were pealing as he laboured.

Wildly beat his heart, and his blood began to race.

Then—there came a light step and, suddenly, beside him

Stood his lady Alice, with a light upon her face.

'Quick,' she said, 'O, quick,' she said, 'they want you,  
Richard Whittington!'

'Quick,' she said; and, while she spoke, her lighted eyes  
betrayed

All that she had hidden long, and all she still would hide from  
him.

So—he turned and followed her, his green-gowned maid.

There, in a broad dark oaken-panelled room  
Rich with black carvings and great gleaming cups  
Of silver, sirs, and massy halpace built  
Half over *Red Rose Lane*, Fitzwarren sat;  
And, at his side, O, like an old romance  
That suddenly comes true and fills the world  
With April colours, two bronzed seamen stood,  
Tattered and scarred, and stained with sun and brine.  
'*Flos Mercatorum*,' Hugh Fitzwarren cried,  
Holding both hands out to the pale-faced boy,  
'The prentice wins the prize! Why, Whittington,  
Thy cat hath caught the biggest mouse of all!'  
And, on to the table, tilting a heavy sack,  
One of the seamen poured a glittering stream  
Of rubies, emeralds, opals, amethysts,  
That turned the room to an Aladdin's cave,  
Or magic goblet brimmed with dusky wine  
Where clustering rainbow-coloured bubbles clung  
And sparkled, in the halls of Prester John.

'And that,' said Hugh Fitzwarren, 'is the price  
Paid for your cat in Barbary, by a King  
Whose house was rich in gems, but sorely plagued  
With rats and mice. Gather it up, my lad,  
And praise your master for his honesty;  
For, though my cargo prospered, yours outshines  
The best of it. Take it, my lad, and go;  
You're a rich man; and, if you use it well,

Riches will make you richer, and the world  
 Will prosper in your own prosperity.  
 The miser, like the cold and barren moon,  
 Shines with a fruitless light. The spendthrift fool  
 Flits like a Jack-o-Lent over quags and fens;  
 But he that's wisely rich gathers his gold  
 Into a fruitful and unwasting sun  
 That spends its glory on a thousand fields  
 And blesses all the world. Take it and go.'

Blankly, as in a dream, Whittington stared.  
 'How should I take it, sir? The ship was yours,  
 And . . .'

'Ay, the ship was mine; but in that ship  
 Your stake was richer than we knew. 'Tis yours.'

'Then,' answered Whittington, 'if this wealth be mine,  
 Who but an hour ago was all so poor,  
 I know one way to make me richer still.'  
 He gathered up the glittering sack of gems,  
 Turned to the halpace, where his green-gowned maid  
 Stood in the glory of the coloured panes.  
 He thrust the splendid load into her arms,  
 Muttering—'Take it, lady! Let me be poor!  
 But rich, at least, in that you not despise  
 The waif you saved.'

—'Despise you, Whittington?'—  
 'O, no, not in the sight of God! But I  
 Grow tired of waiting for the Judgment Day!  
 I am but a man. I am a scullion now;  
 But I would like, only for half an hour,  
 To stand upright and say "I am a king!"'  
 Take it!'

And, as they stood, a little apart,  
 Their eyes were married in one swift level look,  
 Silent, but all that souls could say was said.

And  
 'I know a way,' said the Bell of St. Martin's.  
 'Tell it, and be quick,' laughed the prentices below!  
 'Whittington shall marry her, marry her, marry her!  
 Peal for a wedding,' said the big Bell of Bow.

He shall take a kingdom up, and cast it on the sea again;  
 He shall have his caravels to traffic for him now;  
 He shall see his royal sails rolling up from Araby,  
 And the crest—a honey-bee—golden at the prow.

Whittington! Whittington! The world is all a fairy tale!—  
 Even so we sang for him.—But O, the tale is true!  
 Whittington he married her, and on his merry marriage-day,  
 O, we sang, we sang for him, like lavrocks in the blue.

Far away from London, these happy prentice lovers  
 Wandered through the fern to his western home again,  
 Down by deep Dorset to the wooded isle of Purbeck,  
 Round to little Kimmeridge, by many a lover's lane.

There did they abide as in a dove-cote hidden  
 Deep in happy woods until the bells of duty rang;  
 Then they rode the way he went, a barefoot boy to London,  
 Round by Hampshire forest-roads, but as they rode he  
 sang:—

*Kimmeridge in Dorset is the happiest of places!*  
*All the little homesteads are thatched with beauty there!*  
*All the old ploughmen, there, have happy smiling faces,*  
*Christmas roses in their cheeks, and crowns of silver hair.*

*Blue as are the eggs in the nest of the hedge-sparrow,*  
*Gleam the little rooms in the homestead that I know:*  
*Death, I think, has lost the way to Kimmeridge in Dorset;*  
*Sorrow never knew it, or forgot it, long ago!*

*Kimmeridge in Dorset, Kimmeridge in Dorset,*  
*Though I may not see you more thro' all the years to be,*  
*Yet will I remember the little happy homestead*  
*Hidden in that Paradise where God was good to me.*

So they turned to London, and with mind and soul he laboured,  
*Flos Mercatorum*, for the mighty years to be,  
 Fashioning, for profit—to the years that should forget him!—  
 This, our sacred City that must shine upon the sea.

London was a City when the Poulters ruled the Poultry!

Rosaries of prayer were hung in Paternoster Row,  
Gutter Lane was Guthrun's, then; and, bright with painted  
missal-books,

*Ave Mary Corner*, sirs, was fairer than ye know.

London was mighty when her marchaunts loved their mer-  
chandise,

Bales of Eastern magic that empurpled wharf and quay:  
London was mighty when her booths were a dream-market,  
Loaded with the colours of the sunset and the sea.

There, in all their glory, with the Virgin on their bannerols,  
Glory out of Genoa, the Mercers might be seen,  
Walking to their Company of Marchaunt Adventurers;—  
Gallantly they jetted it in scarlet and in green.

There, in all the glory of the lordly Linen Armourers,  
Walked the Marchaunt Taylors with the Pilgrim of their  
trade,

Fresh from adventuring in Italy and Flanders,  
*Flos Mercatorum*, for a green-gowned maid.

*Flos Mercatorum!* Can a good thing come of Nazareth?

High above the darkness, where our duller senses drown,  
Lifts the splendid Vision of a City, built on merchandise,  
Fairer than that City of Light that wore the violet crown,

Lifts the sacred vision of a far-resplendent City,  
Flashing, like the heart of heaven, its messages afar,  
Trafficking, as God Himself through all His interchanging  
worlds,  
Holding up the scales of law, weighing star by star,

Stern as Justice, in one hand the sword of Truth and Right-  
eousness;

Blind as Justice, in one hand the everlasting scales,  
Lifts the sacred Vision of that City from the darkness,  
Whence the thoughts of men break out, like blossoms, or  
like sails!

Ordered and harmonious, a City built to music,  
 Lifting, out of chaos, the shining towers of law,—  
 Ay, a sacred City, and a City built of merchandise,  
*Flos Mercatorum*, was the City that he saw.

And by that light," quoth Clopton, "did he keep  
 His promise. He was rich; but in his will  
 He wrote those words which should be blazed with gold  
 In London's *Liber Albus*:—

*The desire*

*And busy intention of a man, devout  
 And wise, should be to fore-cast and secure  
 The state and end of this short life with deeds  
 Of mercy and pity, especially to provide  
 For those whom poverty insulteth, those  
 To whom the power of labouring for the needs  
 Of life, is interdicted.*

He became

The Father of the City. Felons died  
 Of fever in old Newgate. He rebuilt  
 The prison. London sickened from the lack  
 Of water, and he made fresh fountains flow.  
 He heard the cry of suffering and disease,  
 And built the stately hospital that still  
 Shines like an angel's lanthorn through the night,  
 The stately halls of St. Bartholomew.  
 He saw men wrapt in ignorance, and he raised  
 Schools, colleges, and libraries. He heard  
 The cry of the old and weary, and he built  
 Houses of refuge.

Even so he kept  
 His prentice vows of Duty, Industry,  
 Obedience, words contemned of every fool  
 Who shrinks from law; yet were those ancient vows  
 The adamantine pillars of the State.  
 Let all who play their Samson be well warned  
 That Samsons perish, too!

His monument

Is London?"

"True," quoth Dekker, "and he deserves  
Well of the Mermaid Inn for one good law,  
Rightly enforced. He pilloried that rogue  
Will Horold, who in Whittington's third year  
Of office, as Lord Mayor, placed certain gums  
And spices in great casks, and filled them up  
With feeble Spanish wine, to have the taste  
And smell of Romeney,—Malmsey!"

"Honest wine, .

Indeed," replied the Clerk, "concerns the State,  
That solemn structure touched with light from heaven,  
Which he, our merchant, helped to build on earth.  
And, while he laboured for it, all things else  
Were added unto him, until the bells  
More than fulfilled their prophecy.

One great eve,

Fair Alice, leaning from her casement, saw  
Another Watch, and mightier than the first,  
Billowing past the newly painted doors  
Of Whittington Palace—so men called his house  
In Hart Street, fifteen yards from old Mark Lane,—  
A thousand burganets and halberdiers,  
A thousand archers in their white silk coats,  
A thousand mounted men in ringing mail,  
A thousand sworded henchmen; then, his Guild,  
Advancing, on their splendid bannerols  
The Virgin, glorious in gold; and then,  
*Flos Mercatorum*, on his great stirring steed  
Whittington! On that night he made a feast  
For London and the King. His feasting hall  
Gleamed like the magic cave that Prester John  
Wrought out of one huge opal. East and West  
Lavished their wealth on that great Citizen  
Who, when the King from Agincourt returned  
Victorious, but with empty coffers, lent  
Three times the ransom of an Emperor  
To fill them—on the royal bond, and said  
When the King questioned him of how and whence,  
'I am the steward of your City, sire!  
There is a sea, and who shall drain it dry?'

Over the roasted swans and peacock pies,  
 The minstrels in the great black gallery tuned  
 All hearts to mirth, until it seemed their cups  
 Were brimmed with dawn and sunset, and they drank  
 The wine of gods. Lord of a hundred ships,  
 Under the feet of England, Whittington flung  
 The purple of the seas. And when the Queen,  
 Catharine, wondered at the costly woods  
 That burned upon his hearth, the Marchaunt rose,  
 He drew the great sealed parchments from his breast,  
 The bonds the King had given him on his loans,  
 Loans that might drain the Mediterranean dry.  
 'They call us hucksters, madam, we that love  
 Our City,' and, into the red-hot heart of the fire,  
 He tossed the bonds of sixty thousand pounds.  
 'The fire burns low,' said Richard Whittington.  
 Then, overhead, the minstrels plucked their strings;  
 And, over the clash of wine-cups, rose a song  
 That made the old timbers of their feasting-hall  
 Shake, as a galleon shakes in a gale of wind,  
 When she rolls glorying through the Ocean-sea:—

Marchaunt Adventurers, O, what shall it profit you  
 Thus to seek your kingdom in the dream-destroying sun?  
 Ask us why the hawthorn brightens on the sky-line:  
 Even so our sails break out when Spring is well begun!  
*Flos Mercatorum!* Blossom wide, ye sail of Englande,  
 Hasten ye the kingdom, now the bitter days are done!  
 Ay, for we be members, one of another,  
 'Each for all and all for each,' quoth Richard Whittington!

*Chorus:*—                    Marchaunt Adventurers,  
                                   Marchaunt Adventurers,  
                                   Marchaunt Adventurers, the Spring is well begun!  
 Break, break out on every sea, O, fair white sails of Englande!  
 'Each for all, and all for each,' quoth Richard Whittington.

Marchaunt Adventurers, O what 'ull ye bring home again?  
 Woonders and works and the thunder of the sea!  
 Whom will ye traffic with? The King of the sunset!—  
 What shall be your pilot, then?—A wind from Galilee!

—Nay, but ye be marchaunts, will ye come back empty-handed?—

Ay, we be marchaunts, though our gain we ne'er shall see!  
Cast we now our bread upon the waste wild waters;  
After many days it shall return with usury.

*Chorus:*—

Marchaunt Adventurers,  
Marchaunt Adventurers,

What shall be your profit in the mighty days to be?  
Englande! Englande! Englande! Englande!  
Glory everlasting and the lordship of the sea.

What need to tell you, sirs, how Whittington  
Remembered? Night and morning, as he knelt  
In those old days, O, like two children still,  
Whittington and his Alice bowed their heads  
Together, praying.

From such simple hearts,  
O never doubt it, though the whole world doubt  
The God that made it, came the steadfast strength  
Of England, all that once was her strong soul,  
The soul that laughed and shook away defeat  
As her strong cliffs hurl back the streaming seas.  
Sirs, in his old age Whittington returned,  
And stood with Alice, by the silent tomb  
In little Pauntley church.

There, to his Arms,  
The Gules and Azure, and the Lion's Head  
So proudly blazoned on the painted panes;  
(O, sirs, the simple wistfulness of it  
Might move hard hearts to laughter, but I think  
Tears tremble through it, for the Mermaid Inn)  
He added his new crest, the hard-won sign  
And lowly prize of his own industry,  
*The Honey-bee.* And, far away, the bells  
Peal softly from the pure white City of God:—

*Ut fragrans nardus  
Fama fuit iste Ricardus.*

With folded hands he waits the Judgment now.  
Slowly our dark bells toll across the world,

For him who waits the reckoning, his accomp<sup>t</sup>  
Secure, his conscience clear, his ledger spread  
A *Liber Albus* flooded with pure light.

*Flos Mercatorum,*  
*Fundator presbyterorum, . . .*

Slowly the dark bells toll for him who asks  
No more of men, but that they may sometimes  
Pray for the souls of Richard Whittington,  
Alice, his wife, and (as themselves of old  
Had prayed) the father and mother of each of them.  
Slowly the great notes fall and float away:—

*Omnibus exemplum*  
*Barathrum vincendo morosum*  
*Condidit hoc templum . . .*  
*Pauperibus pater . . . .*  
*Finit ipse dies*  
*Sis sibi Christe quies. Amen.”*

## IX

### RALEIGH

Ben was our only guest that day. His tribe  
Had flown to their new shrine—the Apollo Room,  
To which, though they encrolled his golden verse  
Above their doors like some great-fruited vine,  
Ben still preferred our *Mermaid*, and to smoke  
Alone in his old nook; perhaps to hear  
The voices of the dead,  
The voices of his old companions,  
Hovering near him,—Will and Kit and Rob.

“Our Ocean-shepherd from the Main-deep sea,  
Raleigh,” he muttered, as I brimmed his cup,  
“Last of the men that broke the fleets of Spain,  
‘Twas not enough to cage him, sixteen years,  
Rotting his heart out in the Bloody Tower,

But they must fling him forth in his old age  
 To hunt for El Dorado. Then, mine host,  
 Because his poor old ship *The Destiny*  
 Smashes the Spaniard, but comes tottering home  
 Without the Spanish gold, our gracious king,  
 To please a catamite,  
 Sends the old lion back to the Tower again.  
 The friends of Spain will send him to the block  
 This time. That male Salome, Buckingham,  
 Is dancing for his head. Raleigh is doomed."  
 A shadow stood in the doorway. We looked up;  
 And there, but O, how changed, how worn and grey,  
 Sir Walter Raleigh, like a hunted thing,  
 Stared at us.

"Ben," he said, and glanced behind him.  
 Ben took a step towards him.

"O, my God,  
 Ben," whispered the old man in a husky voice,  
 Half timorous and half cunning, so unlike  
 His old heroic self that one might weep  
 To hear it, "Ben, I have given them all the slip!  
 I may be followed. Can you hide me here  
 Till it grows dark?"  
 Ben drew him quickly in, and motioned me  
 To lock the door. "Till it grows dark," he cried,  
 "My God, that you should ask it!"

"Do not think,  
 Do not believe that I am quite disgraced,"  
 The old man faltered, "for they'll say it, Ben;  
 And when my boy grows up, they'll tell him, too,  
 His father was a coward. I do cling  
 To life for many reasons, not from fear  
 Of death. No, Ben, I can disdain that still;  
 But—there's my boy!"

Then all his face went blind.  
 He dropt upon Ben's shoulder and sobbed outright,  
 "They are trying to break my pride, to break my pride!"  
 The window darkened, and I saw a face  
 Blurring the panes. Ben gripped the old man's arm,  
 And led him gently to a room within,  
 Out of the way of guests.

"Your pride," he said,  
"That is the pride of England!"

At that name—

*England!—*

As at a signal-gun, heard in the night  
Far out at sea, the weather and world-worn man,  
That once was Raleigh, lifted up his head.  
Old age and weakness, weariness and fear  
Fell from him like a cloak. He stood erect.  
His eager eyes, full of great sea-washed dawns,  
Burned for a moment with immortal youth,  
While tears blurred mine to see him.

"You do think  
That England will remember? You do think it?"  
He asked with a great light upon his face.  
Ben bowed his head in silence.

"I have wronged  
My cause by this," said Raleigh. "Well they know it  
Who left this way for me. I have flung myself  
Like a blind moth into this deadly light  
Of freedom. Now, at the eleventh hour,  
Is it too late? I might return and—"

"No!  
Not now!" Ben interrupted. "I'd have said  
Laugh at the headsman sixteen years ago,  
When England was awake. She will awake  
Again. But now, while our most gracious king,  
Who hates tobacco, dedicates his prayers  
To Buckingham—  
This is no land for men that, under God,  
Shattered the Fleet Invincible."

A knock  
Startled us, at the outer door. "My friend  
Stukeley," said Raleigh, "if I know his hand.  
He has a ketch will carry me to France,  
Waiting at Tilbury."

I let him in,—  
A lean and stealthy fellow, Sir Lewis Stukeley,—  
I liked him little. He thought much of his health,

More of his money bags, and most of all  
On how to run with all men all at once  
For his own profit. At the *Mermaid Inn*  
Men disagreed in friendship and in truth;  
But he agreed with all men, and his life  
Was one soft quag of falsehood. Fugitives  
Must use false keys, I thought; and there was hope  
For Raleigh if such a man would walk one mile  
To serve him now. Yet my throat moved to see him  
Usurping, with one hand on Raleigh's arm,  
A kind of ownership. "*Lend me ten pounds,*"  
Were the first words he breathed in the old man's ear,  
And Raleigh slipped his purse into his hand.

Just over Bread Street hung the bruised white moon  
When they crept out. Sir Lewis Stukeley's watch-dog,  
A derelict bo'sun, with a mulberry face,  
Met them outside. "The coast quite clear, eh, Hart?"  
Said Stukeley. "Ah, that's good. Lead on, then, quick."  
And there, framed in the cruddle of moonlit clouds  
That ended the steep street, dark on its light,  
And standing on those glistening cobblestones  
Just where they turned to silver, Raleigh looked back  
Before he turned the corner. He stood there.  
A figure like foot-feathered Mercury,  
Tall, straight and splendid, waving his plumed hat  
To Ben, and taking his last look, I felt,  
Upon our *Mermaid Tavern*. As he paused,  
His long fantastic shadow swayed and swept  
Against our feet. Then, like a shadow, he passed.

"It is not right," said Ben, "it is not right.  
Why did they give the old man so much grace?  
Witness and evidence are what they lack.  
Would you trust Stukeley—not to draw him out?  
Raleigh was always rash. A phrase or two  
Will turn their murderous axe into a sword  
Of righteousness—

Why, come to think of it,  
 Blackfriar's Wharf, last night, I landed there,  
 And—no, by God!—Raleigh is not himself,  
 The tide will never serve beyond Gravesend.  
 It is a trap! Come on! We'll follow them!  
 Quick! To the river side!"—

We reached the wharf  
 Only to see their wherry, a small black cloud  
 Dwindling far down that running silver road.  
 Ben touched my arm.  
 "Look there," he said, pointing up-stream.

The moon  
 Glanced on a cluster of pikes, like silver thorns,  
 Three hundred yards away, a little troop  
 Of weaponed men, embarking hurriedly.  
 Their great black wherry clumsily swung about,  
 Then, with twelve oars for legs, came striding down,  
 An armoured beetle on the glittering trail  
 Of some small victim.

Just below our wharf  
 A little dinghy waddled.  
 Ben cut the painter, and without one word  
 Drew her up crackling thro' the lapping water,  
 Motioned me to the tiller, thrust her off,  
 And, pulling with one oar, backing with the other,  
 Swirled her round and down, hard on the track  
 Of Raleigh. Ben was an old man now but tough,  
 O tough as a buccaneer. We distanced them.  
 His oar blades drove the silver boiling back.  
 By Broken Wharf the beetle was a speck.  
 It dwindled by Queen Hythe and the Three Cranes.  
 By Bellyn's Gate we had left it, out of sight.  
 By Custom House and Galley Keye we shot  
 Thro' silver all the way, without one glimpse  
 Of Raleigh. Then a dreadful shadow fell  
 And over us the Tower of London rose  
 Like ebony; and, on the glittering reach  
 Beyond it, I could see the small black cloud  
 That carried the great old seaman slowly down  
 Between the dark shores whence in happier years  
 The throng had cheered his golden galleons out,

And watched his proud sails filling for Cathay.  
There, as through lead, we dragged by Traitor's Gate,  
There, in the darkness, under the Bloody Tower,  
There, on the very verge of victory,  
Ben gasped and dropped his oars.  
"Take one and row," he said, "my arms are numbed.  
We'll overtake him yet!" I clambered past him,  
And took the bow oar.

Once, as the pace flagged,  
Over his shoulder he turned his great scarred face  
And snarled, with a trickle of blood on his coarse lips,  
"Hard!"—

And blood and fire ran through my veins again,  
For half a minute more.

Yet we fell back.  
Our course was crookèd now. And suddenly  
A grim black speck began to grow behind us,  
Grow like the threat of death upon old age.  
Then, thickening, blackening, sharpening, foaming, swept  
Up the bright line of bubbles in our wake,  
That armoured wherry, with its long twelve oars  
All well together now.

"Too late," gasped Ben,  
His ash-grey face uplifted to the moon,  
One quivering hand upon the thwart behind him,  
A moment. Then he bowed over his knees  
Coughing. "But we'll delay them. We'll be drunk,  
And hold the catch-polls up!"

We drifted down  
Before them, broadside on. They cheered aside.  
Then, feigning a clumsy stroke, Ben drove our craft  
As they drew level, right in among their blades.  
There was a shout, an oath. They thrust us off;  
And then we swung our nose against their bows  
And pulled them round with every well-meant stroke.  
A full half minute, ere they won quite free,  
Cursing us for a pair of drunken fools.

We drifted down behind them.

"There's no doubt,"  
Said Ben, "the headsman waits behind all this

For Raleigh. This is a play to cheat the soul  
Of England, teach the people to applaud  
The red fifth act."

Without another word we drifted down  
For centuries it seemed, until we came  
To Greenwich.

Then up the long white burnished reach there crept  
Like little sooty clouds the two black boats  
To meet us.

"He is in the trap," said Ben,  
"And does not know it yet. See, where he sits  
By Stukeley as by a friend."

Long after this,  
We heard how Raleigh, simply as a child,  
Seeing the tide would never serve him now,  
And they must turn, had taken from his neck  
Some trinkets that he wore. "Keep them," he said  
To Stukeley, "in remembrance of this night."

He had no doubts of Stukeley when he saw  
The wherry close beside them. He but wrapped  
His cloak a little closer round his face.  
Our boat rocked in their wash when Stukeley dropped  
The mask. We saw him give the sign, and heard  
His high-pitched quavering voice—"IN THE KING'S NAME!"  
Raleigh rose to his feet. "I am under arrest?"  
He said, like a dazed man.

And Stukeley laughed.  
Then, as he bore himself to the grim end,  
All doubt being over, the old sea-king stood  
Among those glittering points, a king indeed.  
The black boats rocked. We heard his level voice,  
*"Sir Lewis, these actions never will turn out  
To your good credit."* Across the moonlit Thames  
It rang contemptuously, cold as cold steel,  
And passionless as the judgment that ends all.

Some three months later, Raleigh's widow came  
To lodge a se'nnight at the Mermaid Inn.  
His house in Bread Street was no more her own,

But in the hands of Stukeley, who had reaped  
A pretty harvest. . . .

She kept close to her room, and that same night,  
Being ill and with some fever, sent her maid  
To fetch the apothecary from Friday Street,  
Old "Galen" as the Mermaid christened him.  
At that same moment, as the maid went out,  
Stukeley came in. He met her at the door;  
And, chucking her under the chin, gave her a letter.  
"Take this up to your mistress. It concerns  
Her property," he said. "Say that I wait,  
And would be glad to speak with her."

The wench

Looked pertly in his face, and tripped upstairs.  
I scarce could trust my hands.

"Sir Lewis," I said,  
"This is no time to trouble her. She is ill."  
"Let her decide," he answered, with a sneer.  
Before I found another word to say  
The maid tripped down again. I scarce believed  
My senses, when she beckoned him up the stair.  
Shaking from head to foot, I blocked the way.  
"Property!" Could the crux of mine and thine  
Bring widow and murderer into one small room?  
"Sir Lewis," I said, "she is ill. It is not right!  
She never would consent."

He sneered again,  
"You are her doctor? Out of the way, old fool!  
She has decided!"

"Go," I said to the maid,  
"Fetch the apothecary. Let it rest  
With him!"

She tossed her head. Her quick eyes glanced,  
Showing the white, like the eyes of a vicious mare.  
She laughed at Stukeley, loitered, then obeyed.

And so we waited, till the wench returned,  
With Galen at her heels. His wholesome face,  
Russet and wrinkled like an apple, peered  
Shrewdly at Stukeley, twinkled once at me,

And passed in silence, leaving a whiff of herbs  
Behind him on the stair.

Five minutes later,  
To my amazement, that same wholesome face  
Leaned from the lighted door above, and called  
"Sir Lewis Stukeley!"

Sir Judas hastened up.  
The apothecary followed him within.  
The door shut. I was left there in the dark  
Bewildered; for my heart was hot with thoughts  
Of those last months. Our Summer's Nightingale,  
Our Ocean-Shepherd from the Main-deep Sea,  
The Founder of our Mermaid Fellowship,  
Was this his guerdon—at the Mermaid Inn?  
Was this that maid-of-honour whose romance  
With Raleigh, once, had been a kingdom's talk?  
Could Bess Throckmorton slight his memory thus?  
"It is not right," I said, "it is not right.  
She wrongs him deeply."

I leaned against the porch  
Staring into the night. A ghostly ray  
Above me, from her window, bridged the street,  
And rested on the goldsmith's painted sign  
Opposite.

I could hear the muffled voice  
Of Stukeley overhead, persuasive, bland;  
And then, her own, cooing, soft as a dove  
Calling her mate from Eden cedar-boughs,  
Flowed on and on; and then—all my flesh crept  
At something worse than either, a long space  
Of silence that stretched threatening and cold,  
Cold as a dagger-point pricking the skin  
Over my heart.

Then came a stifled cry,  
A crashing door, a footstep on the stair  
Blundering like a drunkard's, heavily down;  
And with his gasping face one tragic mask  
Of horror,—may God help me to forget  
Some day the frozen awful eyes of one  
Who, fearing neither hell nor heaven, has met  
That ultimate weapon of the gods, the face

And serpent-tresses that turn flesh to stone—  
Stukeley stumbled, groping his way out,  
Blindly, past me, into the sheltering night.

It was the last night of another year  
Before I understood what punishment  
Had overtaken Stukeley. Ben, and Brome—  
Ben's ancient servant, but turned poet now—  
Sat by the fire with the old apothecary  
To see the New Year in.

The starry night  
Had drawn me to the door. Could it be true  
That our poor earth no longer was the hub  
Of those white wheeling orbs? I scarce believed  
The strange new dreams; but I had seen the veils  
Rent from vast oceans and huge continents,  
Till what was once our comfortable fire,  
Our cosy tavern, and our earthly home  
With heaven beyond the next turn in the road,  
All the resplendent fabric of our world  
Shrank to a glow-worm, lighting up one leaf  
In one small forest, in one little land,  
Among those wild infinitudes of God.  
A tattered wastrel wandered down the street,  
Clad in a seaman's jersey, staring hard  
At every sign. Beneath our own, the light  
Fell on his red carbuncled face. I knew him—  
The bo'sun, Hart.

He pointed to our sign  
And leered at me. "That's her," he said, "no doubt,  
The sea-witch with the shiny mackerel tail  
Swishing in wine. That's what Sir Lewis meant.  
He called it blood. Blood is his craze, you see.  
This is the Mermaid Tavern, sir, no doubt?"  
I nodded. "Ah, I thought as much," he said.  
"Well—happen this is worth a cup of ale."  
He thrust his hand under his jersey and lugged  
A greasy letter out. It was inscribed  
THE APOTHECARY AT THE MERMAID TAVERN.

I led him in. "I knew it, sir," he said,  
While Galen broke the seal. "Soon as I saw  
That sweet young naked wench curling her tail  
In those red waves.—The old man called it blood.  
Blood is his craze, you see.—But you can tell  
'Tis wine, sir, by the foam. Malmsey, no doubt.  
And that sweet wench to make you smack your lips  
Like oysters, with her slippery tail and all!  
Why, sir, no doubt, this was the Mermaid Inn."

"But this," said Galen, lifting his grave face  
To Ben, "this letter is from all that's left  
Of Stukeley. The good host, there, thinks I wronged  
Your Ocean-shepherd's memory. From this letter,  
I think I helped to avenge him. Do not wrong  
His widow, even in thought. She loved him dearly.  
You know she keeps his poor grey severed head  
Embalmed; and so will keep it till she dies;  
Weeps over it alone. I have heard such things  
In wild Italian tales. But *this* was true.  
Had I refused to let her speak with Stukeley  
I feared she would go mad. This letter proves  
That I—and she perhaps—were instruments,  
Of some more terrible chirurgery  
Than either knew."

"Ah, when I saw your sign,"  
The bo'sun interjected, "I'd no doubt  
That letter was well worth a cup of ale."

"Go—paint your bows with hell-fire somewhere else,  
Not at this inn," said Ben, tossing the rogue  
A good French crown. "Pickle yourself in hell."  
And Hart lurched out into the night again,  
Muttering "Thank you, sirs. 'Twas worth all that.  
No doubt at all."

"There are some men," said Galen,  
Spreading the letter out on his plump knees,  
"Will heap up wrong on wrong; and, at the last,  
Wonder because the world will not forget  
Just when it suits them, cancel all they owe,  
And, like a mother, hold its arms out wide  
At their first cry. And, sirs, I do believe

That Stukeley, on that night, had some such wish  
To reconcile himself. What else had passed  
Between the widow and himself I know not;  
But she had lured him on until he thought  
That words and smiles, perhaps a tear or two,  
Might make the widow take the murderer's hand  
In friendship, since it might advantage both.  
Indeed, he came prepared for even more.  
Villains are always fools. A wicked act,  
What is it but a false move in the game,  
A blind man's blunder, a deaf man's reply,  
The wrong drug taken in the dead of night?  
I always pity villains.

I mistook

The avenger for the victim. There she lay  
Panting, that night, her eyes like summer stars  
Her pale gold hair upon the pillows tossed  
Dishevelled, while the fever in her face  
Brought back the lost wild roses of her youth  
For half an hour. Against a breast as pure  
And smooth as any maid's, her soft arms pressed  
A bundle wrapped in a white embroidered cloth.  
She crooned over it as a mother croons  
Over her suckling child. I stood beside her.  
—That was her wish, and mine, while Stukeley stayed.—  
And, over against me, on the other side,  
Stood Stukeley, gnawing his nether lip to find  
She could not, or she would not, speak one word  
In answer to his letter.

'Lady Raleigh,  
You wrong me, and you wrong yourself,' he cried,  
'To play like a green girl when great affairs  
Are laid before you. Let me speak with you  
Alone.'

'But I am all alone,' she said,  
'Far more alone than I have ever been  
In all my life before. This is my doctor.  
He must not leave me.'

Then she lured him on,  
Played on his brain as a musician plays  
Upon the lute.

'Forgive me, dear Sir Lewis,  
If I am grown too gay for widowhood.  
But I have pondered for a long, long time  
On all these matters. I know the world was right;  
And Spain was right, Sir Lewis. Yes, and you,  
You too, were right; and my poor husband wrong.  
You see I knew his mind so very well.  
I knew his every gesture, every smile.  
I lived with him. I think I died with him.  
It is a strange thing, marriage. For my soul  
(As if myself were present in this flesh)  
Beside him, slept in his grey prison-cell  
On that last dreadful dawn. I heard the throng  
Murmuring round the scaffold far away;  
And, with the smell of sawdust in my nostrils,  
I woke, bewildered as himself, to see  
That tall black-cassocked figure by his bed.  
I heard the words that made him understand:  
*The Body of our Lord—take and eat this!*  
I rolled the small sour flakes beneath my tongue  
With him. I caught, with him, the gleam of tears,  
Far off, on some strange face of sickly dread.  
*The Blood*—and the cold cup was in my hand,  
Cold as an axe-heft washed with waterish red.  
I heard his last poor cry to wife and child.—  
Could any that heard forget it?—*My true God,*  
*Hold you both in His arms, both in His arms.*  
And then—that last poor wish, a thing to raise  
A smile in some. I have smiled at it myself  
A thousand times.

"*Give me my pipe,*" he said,  
"*My old Winchester clay, with the long stem,*  
*And half an hour alone. The crowd can wait.*  
*They have not waited half so long as I.*"  
And then, O then, I know what soft blue clouds,  
What wavering rings, fragrant ascending wreaths  
Melted his prison walls to a summer haze,  
Through which I think he saw the little port  
Of Budleigh Salterton, like a sea-bird's nest  
Among the Devon cliffs—the tarry quay  
Whence in his boyhood he had flung a line

For bass or whiting-pollock. I remembered  
(Had he not told me, on some summer night,  
His arm about my neck, kissing my hair)  
He used to sit there, gazing out to sea;  
Fish, and for what? Not all for what he caught  
And handled; but for rainbow-coloured things,  
The water-drops that jewelled his thin line,  
Flotsam and jetsam of the sunset-clouds;  
While the green water, gurgling through the piles,  
Heaving and sinking, helped him to believe  
The fast-bound quay a galleon plunging out  
Superbly for Cathay. There would he sit  
Listening, a radiant boy, child of the sea,  
Listening to some old seaman's glowing tales,  
His grey eyes rich with pictures—

Then he saw,

And I with him, that gathering in the West,  
To break the Fleet Invincible. O, I heard  
The trumpets and the neighings and the drums.  
I watched the beacons on a hundred hills.  
I drank that wine of battle from *his* cup,  
And gloried in it, lying against his heart.  
I sailed with him and saw the unknown worlds!  
The slender ivory towers of old Cathay  
Rose for us over lilac-coloured seas  
That crumbled a sky-blue foam on long shores  
Of shining sand, shores of so clear a glass  
They drew the sunset-clouds into their bosom  
And hung that City of Vision in mid-air  
Girdling it round, as with a moat of sky,  
Hopelessly beautiful. O, yet I heard,  
Heard from his blazoned poops the trumpeters  
Blowing proud calls, while overhead the flag  
Of England floated from white towers of sail—  
And yet, and yet, I knew that he was wrong,  
And soon he knew it, too.

I saw the cloud  
Of doubt assail him, in the Bloody Tower,  
When, being withheld from sailing the high seas  
For sixteen years, he spread a prouder sail,  
Took up his pen, and, walled about with stone,

Began to write—his *History of the World*.  
And emperors came like Lazarus from the grave  
To wear his purple. And the night disgorged  
Its empires, till, O, like the swirl of dust  
Around their marching legions, that dim cloud  
Of doubt closed round him. Was there any man  
So sure of heart and brain as to record  
The simple truth of things himself had seen?  
Then who could plumb that night? The work broke off!  
He knew that he was wrong. I knew it, too!  
Once more that stately structure of his dreams  
Melted like mist. His eagles perished like clouds.  
Death wound a thin horn through the centuries.  
The grave resumed his forlorn emperors.  
His empires crumbled back to a little ash  
Knocked from his pipe.—  
He dropped his pen in homage to the truth.  
The truth? *O, eloquent, just and mighty Death!*

Then, when he forged, out of one golden thought,  
A key to open his prison; when the King  
Released him for a tale of faërie gold  
Under the tropic palms; when those grey walls  
Melted before his passion; do you think  
The gold that lured the King was quite the same  
As that which Raleigh saw? You know the song:

“Say to the King,” quoth Raleigh,  
“I have a tale to tell him;  
Wealth beyond derision,  
Veils to lift from the sky,  
Seas to sail for England,  
And a little dream to sell him,  
Gold, the gold of a vision  
That angels cannot buy.”

Ah, no! For all the beauty and the pride,  
Raleigh was wrong; but not so wrong, I think,  
As those for whom his kingdoms oversea  
Meant only glittering dust. The fight he waged  
Was not with them. They never worsted him.

It was *The Destiny* that brought him home  
Without the Spanish gold.— O, he was wrong,  
But such a wrong, in Gloriana's day,  
Was more than right, was immortality.  
He had just half an hour to put all this  
Into his pipe and smoke it.—

The red fire,

The red heroic fire that filled his veins  
When the proud flag of England floated out  
Its challenge to the world—all gone to ash?  
What! Was the great red wine that Drake had quaffed  
Vinegar? He must fawn, haul down his flag,  
And count all nations nobler than his own,  
Tear out the lions from the painted shields  
That hung his poop, for fear that he offend  
The pride of Spain? Treason to sack the ships  
Of Spain? The wounds of slaughtered Englishmen  
Cried out—*there is no law beyond the line!*  
Treason to sweep the seas with Francis Drake?  
Treason to fight for England?

If it were so,

The times had changed and quickly. He had been  
A schoolboy in the morning of the world  
Playing with wooden swords and winning crowns  
Of tinsel; but his comrades had outgrown  
Their morning-game, and gathered round to mock  
His battles in the sunset. Yet he knew  
That all his life had passed in that brief day;  
And he was old, too old to understand  
The smile upon the face of Buckingham,  
The smile on Cobham's face, at that great word  
*England!*

He knew the solid earth was changed  
To something less than dust among the stars—  
And, O, be sure he knew that he was wrong,  
That gleams would come,  
Gleams of a happier world for younger men,  
That Commonwealth, far off. This was a time  
Of sadder things, destruction of the old  
Before the new was born. At least he knew  
It was his own way that had brought the world

Thus far, England thus far! How could he change,  
Who had loved England as a man might love  
His mistress, change from year to fickle year?  
For the new years would change, even as the old.  
No—he was wedded to that old first love,  
Crude flesh and blood, and coarse as meat and drink,  
The woman—England; no fine angel-isle,  
Ruled by that male Salome—Buckingham!  
Better the axe than to live on and wage  
These new and silent and more deadly wars  
That play at friendship with our enemies.  
Such times are evil. Not of their own desire  
They lead to good, blind agents of that Hand  
Which now had hewed him down, down to his knees,  
But in a prouder battle than men knew.

His pipe was out, the guard was at the door.  
Raleigh was not a god. But, when he climbed  
The scaffold, I believe he looked a man.  
And when the axe fell, I believe that God  
Set on his shoulders that immortal head  
Which he desired on earth.

O, he was wrong!  
But when that axe fell, not one shout was raised.  
That mighty throng around that crimson block  
Stood silent—like the hushed black cloud that holds  
The thunder. You might hear the headsman's breath.  
Stillness like that is dangerous, being charged,  
Sometimes, with thought, Sir Lewis! England sleeps!  
What if, one day, the Stewart should be called  
To know that England wakes? What if a shout  
Should thunder-strike Whitehall, and the dogs lift  
Their heads along the fringes of the crowd  
To catch a certain savour that I know,  
The smell of blood and sawdust?—

Ah, Sir Lewis,

'Tis hard to find one little seed of right  
Among so many wrongs. Raleigh was wrong,  
And yet—it was because he loved his country  
Next to himself, Sir Lewis, by your leave,

His country butchered him. You did not know  
 That I was only third in his affections?  
 The night I told him—we were parting then—  
 I had begged the last disposal of his body,  
 Did he not say, with O, so gentle a smile,  
*"Thou hadst not always the disposal of it  
 In life, dear Bess. 'Tis well it should be thine  
 In death!"'*

'The jest was bitter at such an hour,  
 And somewhat coarse in grain,' Stukeley replied.  
 'Indeed I thought him kinder.'

'Kinder,' she said,  
 Laughing bitterly.

Stukeley looked at her.  
 She whispered something, and his lewd old eyes  
 Fastened upon her own. He knelt by her.  
 'Perhaps,' he said, 'your woman's wit has found  
 A better way to solve this bitter business.'  
 Her head moved on the pillow with little tossings.  
 He touched her hand. It leapt quickly away.  
 She hugged that strange white bundle to her breast,  
 And writhed back, smiling at him, across the bed.

'Ah, Bess,' he whispered huskily, pressing his lips  
 To that warm hollow where her head had lain,  
 'There is one way to close the long dispute,  
 Keep the estates unbroken in your hands  
 And stop all slanderous tongues, one happy way.  
 We have some years to live; and why alone?'  
 'Alone?' she sighed. 'My husband thought of that.  
 He wrote a letter to me long ago,  
 When he was first condemned. He said—he said—  
 Now let me think—what was it that he said?—  
 I had it all by heart. "*Beseech you, Bess,  
 Hide not yourself for many days*," he said.'  
 'True wisdom that,' quoth Stukeley, 'for the love  
 That seeks to chain the living to the dead  
 Is but self-love at best!'

'And yet,' she said,  
 'How his poor heart was torn between two cares,  
 Love of himself and care for me, as thus:

*Love God! Begin to repose yourself on Him!  
Therein you shall find true and lasting riches;  
But all the rest is nothing. When you have tired  
Your thoughts on earthly things, when you have travelled  
Through all the glittering pomps of this proud world  
You shall sit down by Sorrow in the end.  
Begin betimes, and teach your little son  
To serve and fear God also.  
Then God will be a husband unto you,  
And unto him a father; nor can Death  
Bereave you any more. When I am gone,  
No doubt you shall be sought unto by many  
For the world thinks that I was very rich.  
No greater misery can befall you, Bess,  
Than to become a prey, and, afterwards,  
To be despised.'*

'Human enough,' said Stukeley,  
'And yet—self-love, self-love!'

'Ah no,' quoth she,

'You have not heard the end: *God knows, I speak it.*  
*Not to dissuade you—not to dissuade you, mark—*  
*From marriage. That will be the best for you,*  
*Both in respect of God and of the world.*

Was that self-love, Sir Lewis? Ah, not all.  
And thus he ended: *For his father's sake*  
*That chose and loved you in his happiest times,*  
*Remember your poor child! The Everlasting,*  
*Infinite, powerful, and inscrutable God,*  
*Keep you and yours, have mercy upon me,*  
*And teach me to forgive my false accusers—*  
Wrong, even in death, you see. Then—*My true wife,*  
*Farewell!*

*Bless my poor boy! Pray for me! My true God,*  
*Hold you both in His arms, both in His arms!*  
I know that he was wrong. You did not know,  
Sir Lewis, that he had left me a little child.  
Come closer. You shall see its orphaned face,  
The sad, sad relict of a man that loved  
His country—all that's left to me. Come, look!  
She beckoned Stukeley nearer. He bent down  
Curiously. Her feverish fingers drew

The white wrap from the bundle in her arms,  
 And, with a smile that would make angels weep,  
 She showed him, pressed against her naked breast,  
 Terrible as Medusa, the grey flesh  
 And shrivelled face, embalmed, the thing that dropped  
 Into the headsman's basket, months agone,—  
 The head of Raleigh.

Half her body lay  
 Bare, while she held that grey babe to her heart;  
 But Judas hid his face. . . .  
 'Living,' she said, 'he was not always mine;  
 But—dead—I shall not wean him'—

Then, I too  
 Covered my face— I cannot tell you more.  
 There was a dreadful silence in that room,  
 Silence that, as I know, shattered the brain  
 Of Stukeley.— When I dared to raise my head  
 Beneath that silent thunder of our God,  
 The man had gone—

This is his letter, sirs,  
 Written from Lundy Island: *For God's love,*  
*Tell them it is a cruel thing to say*  
*That I drink blood. I have no secret sin.*  
*A thousand pound is not so great a sum;*  
*And that is all they paid me, every penny.*  
*Salt water, that is all the drink I taste*  
*On this rough island. Somebody has taught*  
*The sea-gulls how to wail around my hut*  
*All night, like lost souls. And there is a face,*  
*A dead man's face that laughs in every storm,*  
*And sleeps in every pool along the coast.*  
*I thought it was my own, once. But I know*  
*These actions never, never, on God's earth,*  
*Will turn out to their credit, who believe*  
*That I drink blood."*

He crumpled up the letter  
 And tossed it into the fire.

"Galen," said Ben,  
 "I think you are right—that one should pity villains."

The clock struck twelve. The bells began to peal.  
We drank a cup of sack to the New Year.  
"New songs, new voices, all as fresh as may,"  
Said Ben to Brome, "but I shall never live  
To hear them."

All was not so well, indeed,  
With Ben, as hitherto. Age had come upon him.  
He dragged one foot as in paralysis.  
The critics bayed against the old lion, now,  
And called him arrogant. "My brain," he said,  
"Is yet unhurt although, set round with pain,  
It cannot long hold out." He never stooped,  
Never once pandered to that brainless hour.  
His coat was thread-bare. Weeks had passed of late  
Without his voice resounding in our inn.

"The statues are defiled, the gods dethroned,  
The Ionian movement reigns, not the free soul.  
And, as for me, I have lived too long," he said.  
"Well—I can weave the old threnodies anew."  
And, filling his cup, he murmured, soft and low,  
A new song, breaking on an ancient shore:

## I

Marlowe is dead, and Greene is in his grave,  
And sweet Will Shakespeare long ago is gone!  
Our Ocean-shepherd sleeps beneath the wave;  
Robin is dead, and Marlowe in his grave.  
Why should I stay to chant an idle stave,  
And in my Mermaid Tavern drink alone?  
For Kit is dead and Greene is in his grave,  
And sweet Will Shakespeare long ago is gone.

## II

Where is the singer of the Faërie Queen?  
Where are the lyric lips of Astrophel?  
Long, long ago, their quiet graves were green;  
Av, and the grave, too, of their Faërie Queen!

And yet their faces, hovering here unseen,  
 Call me to taste their new-found cenomel;  
 To sup with him who sang the Faërie Queen;  
 To drink with him whose name was Astrophel.

## III

I drink to that great Inn beyond the grave!  
 —If there be none, the gods have done us wrong.—  
 Ere long I hope to chant a better stave,  
 In some great Mermaid Inn beyond the grave;  
 And quaff the best of earth that heaven can save,  
 Red wine like blood, deep love of friends and song.  
 I drink to that great Inn beyond the grave;  
 And hope to greet my golden lads ere long.

He raised his cup and drank in silence. Brome  
 Drank with him, too. The bells had ceased to peal.  
 Galen shook hands, and bade us all good-night.  
 Then Brome, a little wistfully, I thought,  
 Looked at his old-time master, and prepared  
 To follow.

“Good-night—Ben,” he said, a pause  
 Before he spoke the name. “Good-night! Good-night!  
 My dear old Brome,” said Ben.

And, at the door,  
 Brome whispered to me, “He is lonely now.  
 There are not many left of his old friends.  
 We all go out—like this—into the night.  
 But what a fleet of stars!” he said, and shook  
 My hand, and smiled, and pointed to the sky.  
 And, when I looked into the room again,  
 The lights were very dim, and I believed  
 That Ben had fallen asleep. His great grey head  
 Was bowed across the table, on his arms.  
 Then, all at once, I knew that he was weeping;  
 And like a shadow I crept back again,  
 And stole into the night.

There as I stood  
 Under the painted sign, I could have vowed  
 That I, too, heard the voices of the dead,

The voices of his old companions,  
 Gathering round him in that lonely room,  
 Till all the timbers of the Mermaid Inn  
 Trembled above me with their ghostly song:

## I

Say to the King, quoth Raleigh  
 I have a tale to tell him,  
 Wealth beyond derision,  
 Veils to lift from the sky,  
 Seas to sail for England  
 And a little dream to sell him,—  
 Gold, the gold of a vision,  
 That angels cannot buy.

## II

Fair thro' the walls of his dungeon,  
 —What were the stones but a shadow?—  
 Streamed the light of the rapture,  
 The lure that he followed of old,  
 The dream of his old companions,  
 The vision of El Dorado,  
 The fleet that they never could capture,  
 The City of Sunset-gold.

## III

Yet did they sail the seas  
 And, dazed with exceeding wonder,  
 Straight through the sunset-glory  
 Plunge into the dawn:  
 Leaving their home behind them,  
 By a road of splendour and thunder,  
 They came to their home in amazement  
 Simply by sailing on.

## NEW POEMS

## A WATCHWORD OF THE FLEET

[*For purposes of recognition at night a small squadron of Elizabethan ships, crossing the Atlantic, adopted as a watchword the sentence: Before the world—was God.]*

They diced with Death. Their big sea-boots  
     Were greased with blood. They swept the seas  
 For England; and—we reap the fruits  
     Of their heroic deviltries!

Our creed is in the cold machine,  
     The inhuman devildoms of brain,  
 The bolt that splits the midnight main,  
     Loosed at a lever's touch; the lean  
     Torpedo; "Twenty Miles of Power";  
 The steel-clad Dreadnoughts' dark array!  
     Yet . . . we that keep the conning tower  
 Are not so strong as they  
     Whose watchword we disdain.

They laughed at odds for England's sake!  
     We count, yet cast our strength away.  
 One Admiral with the soul of Drake  
     Would break the fleets of hell to-day!  
 Give us the splendid heavens of youth,  
     Give us the banners of deathless flame,  
     The ringing watchwords of their fame,  
 The faith, the hope, the simple truth!  
     Then shall the Deep indeed be swayed  
 Through all its boundless breadth and length,  
     Nor this proud England lean dismayed  
 On twenty miles of strength,  
     Or shrink from aught but shame.

Pull out by night, O leave the shore  
     And lighted streets of Plymouth town,  
 Pull out into the Deep once more!  
     There, in the night of their renown,

The same great waters roll their gloom  
 Around our midget period;  
 And the huge decks that Raleigh trod  
 Over our petty darkness loom!  
 Along the line the cry is passed  
 From all their heaven-illumined spars,  
 Clear as a bell, from mast to mast,  
 It rings against the stars:  
*Before the world—was God.*

## NEW WARS FOR OLD

*"Peace with its luxury is the corrupter of Nations."*  
*Any militarist Journal*

## I

Peace! When have we prayed for peace?  
 Over us burns a star  
 Bright, beautiful, red for strife!  
 Yours are only the drum and the fife  
 And the golden braid and the surface of life!  
 Ours is the white-hot war!

## II

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?  
 Ours are the weapons of men!  
 Time changes the face of the world!  
 Therefore your ancient flags are furled,  
 And ours are the unseen legions hurled  
 Up to the heights again!

## III

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?  
 Is there no wrong to right?  
 Wrong crying to God on high  
 Here where the weak and the helpless die,  
 And the homeless hordes of the city go by,  
 The ranks are rallied to-night!

## IV

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?  
 Are ye so dazed with words?  
 Earth, heaven, shall pass away  
 Ere for your passionless peace we pray!  
 Are ye deaf to the trumpets that call us to-day,  
 Blind to the blazing swords?

## THE PRAYER FOR PEACE

*"Unless public opinion can rise to the height of discussing the substitution of law for force as a great world-movement, the American arbitration proposals cannot be carried out."*

*Sir Edward Grey.*

## I

Dare we—though our hope deferred  
 Left us faithless long ago—  
 Dare we let our hearts be stirred,  
 Lift them to the light and *know*,  
 Cast away our cynic shields,  
 Break the sword that Mockery wields,  
*Know* that Truth indeed prevails,  
 And that Justice holds the scales?  
 Britain, kneel!  
 Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

## II

Dare we know that this great hour,  
 Dawning on thy long renown,  
 Marks the purpose of thy power,  
 Crowns thee with a mightier crown,  
 Know that to this purpose climb  
 All the blood-red wars of Time?  
 If indeed thou *hast* a goal  
 Beaconing to thy warrior soul,  
 Britain, kneel!  
 Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

## III

Dare we know what every age  
Writes with an unerring hand,  
Read the midnight's moving page,—  
Read the stars and understand,—  
Out of Chaos ye shall draw  
Linked harmonies of Law,  
Till around the Eternal Sun  
All your peoples move in one?  
                  Britain, kneel!  
Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

## IV

Dare we know that wearied eyes  
Dimmed with dust of every day  
*Can*, once more, desire the skies  
And the glorious upward way?  
Dare we, if the Truth should still  
Vex with doubt our alien will,  
Take it to our Maker's throne,  
Let Him speak with us alone?  
                  Britain, kneel!  
Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

## V

*Dare we cast our pride away?*  
Dare we tread where Lincoln trod?  
*All the Future, by this day,*  
Waits to judge us and our God!  
*Set the struggling peoples free!*  
*Crown with Law their Liberty!*  
*Proud with an immortal pride,*  
*Kneel we at our Sister's side!*  
                  Britain, kneel!  
Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

## THE SWORD OF ENGLAND

*(Written during a European war crisis)*

Not as one muttering in a spell-bound sleep  
 Shall England speak the word;  
 Not idly bid the embattled lightnings leap,  
 Nor lightly draw the sword!

Let statesmen grope by night in a blind dream,  
 The cold clear morning star  
 Should like a trophy in her helmet gleam  
 When England sweeps to war!

Not like a derelict, drunk with surf and spray,  
 And drifting down to doom;  
 But like the Sun-god calling up the day  
 Should England rend that gloom.

Not as in trance, at some hypnotic call,  
 Nor with a doubtful cry;  
 But a clear faith, like a banner above us all,  
 Rolling from sky to sky.

She sheds no blood to that vain god of strife  
 Whom striplings call "renown";  
 She knows that only they who reverence life  
 Can nobly lay it down;

And these will ride from child and home and love,  
 Through death and hell that day;  
 But O, her faith, her flag, must burn above,  
 Her soul must lead the way!

## THE DAWN OF PEACE

Yes—"on our brows we feel the breath  
 Of dawn," though in the night we wait!  
 An arrow is in the heart of Death,  
 A God is at the doors of Fate!

The spirit that moved upon the Deep  
Is moving through the minds of men:  
The nations feel it in their sleep,  
A change has touched their dreams again.

Voices, confused, and faint, arise,  
Troubling their hearts from East and West.  
A doubtful light is in their skies,  
A gleam that will not let them rest:  
The dawn, the dawn is on the wing,  
The stir of change on every side,  
Unsignalled as the approach of Spring,  
Invincible as the hawthorn-tide.

Have ye not heard it, far and nigh,  
The voice of France across the dark,  
And all the Atlantic with one cry  
Beating the shores of Europe?—hark!  
Then—if ye will—uplift your word  
Of cynic wisdom! Once again  
Tell us He came to bring a sword,  
Tell us He lived and died in vain.

Say that we dream! Our dreams have woven  
Truths that out-face the burning sun:  
The lightnings, that we dreamed, have cloven  
Time, space, and linked all lands in one!  
Dreams! But their swift celestial fingers  
Have knit the world with threads of steel,  
Till no remotest island lingers  
Beyond the world's one Commonweal.

Tell us that custom, sloth, and fear  
Are strong, then name them “common-sense”!  
Tell us that greed rules everywhere,  
Then dub the lie “experience”:  
Year after year, age after age,  
Has handed down, thro' fool and child,  
For earth's divinest heritage  
The dreams whereon old wisdom smiled.

Dreams are they? But ye cannot stay them,  
Or thrust the dawn back for one hour!  
Truth, Love, and Justice, if ye slay them,  
Return with more than earthly power:  
Strive, if ye will, to seal the fountains  
That send the Spring thro' leaf and spray:  
Drive back the sun from the Eastern mountaints,  
Then—bid this mightier movement stay.

It is the Dawn of Peace! The nations  
From East to West have heard a cry,—  
“Though all earth's blood-red generations  
By hate and slaughter climbed thus high,  
Here—on this height—still to aspire,  
One only path remains untrod,  
One path of love and peace climbs higher!  
Make straight that highway for our God.”

### THE BRINGERS OF GOOD NEWS

Like fallen stars the watch-fires gleamed  
Along our menaced age that night!  
Our bivouacked century tossed and dreamed  
Of battle with the approaching light.

Rumors of change, a sea-like roar,  
Shook the firm earth with doubt and dread:  
The clouds, in rushing legions bore  
Their tattered eagles overhead.

I saw the muffled sentries rest  
On the dark hills of Time. I saw  
Around them march from East to West  
The stars of the unresting law.

I knew that in their mighty course  
They brought the dawn, they brought the day;  
And that the unconquerable force  
Of the new years was on the way.

I heard the feet of that great throng!

I saw them shine, like hope, afar!

Their shout, their shout was like a song,

And O, 'twas not a song of war!

Yet, as the whole world with their tramp

Quivered, a signal-lightning spoke,

A bugle warned our darkling camp,

And, like a thunder-cloud, it woke.

Our searchlights raked the world's wide ends.

O'er the dark hills a grey light crept.

Down, through the light, that host of friends

We took for foemen, triumphing swept.

The old century could not hear their cry,

How should it hear the song they sang?

*We bring good news!* It pierced the sky!

*We bring good news!* The welkin rang.

One shout of triumph and of faith;

And then—our shattering cannon roared!

But, over the reeking ranks of death,

The song rose like a single sword.

*We bring good news!* Red flared the guns!

*We bring good news!* The sabres flashed!

And the dark age with its own sons

In blind and furious battle clashed.

A swift, a terrible bugle pealed.

The sulphurous clouds were rolled away.

Embraced, embraced, on that red field,

The wounded and the dying lay.

*We bring good news!* Blood choked the word,

—We knew you not; so dark the night!—

*O father, was I worth your sword?*

*O son, O herald of the light!*

*We bring good news!—The darkness fills  
Mine eyes!—Nay, the night ebbs away!  
And, over the everlasting hills,  
The great new dawn led on the day.*

### THE LONELY SHRINE

(*A few months after the Milton Ter-centenary.*)

#### I

The crowd has passed away,  
Faded the feast, and most forget!  
Master, we come with lowly hearts to pay  
Our deeper debt.

#### II

High they upheld the wine,  
And royally, royally drank to thee!  
Loud were their plaudits. Now the lonely shrine  
Accepts our knee.

#### III

All dark and silent now!  
Master, thy few are faithful still,  
And nightly hear thy brooks that warbling flow  
By Siloa's hill.

### AT NOON

(AFTER THE FRENCH OF VERLAINE)

The sky is blue above the roof,  
So calm, so blue;  
One rustling bough above the roof  
Rocks, the noon through.

The bell-tower in the sky, aloof,  
 Tenderly rings!  
 A bird upon the bough, aloof,  
 Sorrows and sings.

My God, my God, and life is here  
 So simple and still!  
 Far off, the murmuring town I hear  
 At the wind's will . . . .

*What hast thou done, thou, weeping there?  
 O quick, the truth!  
 What hast thou done, thou, weeping there,  
 With thy lost youth?*

## TO A FRIEND OF BOYHOOD LOST AT SEA

O warm blue sky and dazzling sea,  
 Where have you hid my friend from me?  
 The white-chalk coast, the leagues of surf  
 Laugh to the May-light, now as then,  
 And violets in the short sweet turf  
 Make fragmentary heavens again,  
 And sea-born wings of rustling snow  
 Pass and re-pass as long ago.

Old friend, do you remember yet  
 The days when secretly we met  
 In that old harbor 'years a-back,  
 Where I admired your billowing walk,  
 Or in that perilous fishing smack  
 What tarry oaths perfumed your talk,  
 The sails we set, the ropes we spliced,  
 The raw potato that we sliced,

For mackerel-bait—and how it shines  
 Far down, at end of the taut lines!—  
 And the great catch we made that day,

Loading our boat with rainbows, quick  
 And quivering, while you smoked your clay:  
 And I took home your "Deadwood Dick"  
 In yellow and red, when day was done  
 And you took home my Stevenson?

Not leagues, as when you sailed the deep,  
 But only some frail bars of sleep  
 Sever us now! Methinks you still  
 Recall, as I, in dreams, the quay,  
 The little port below the hill:  
 And all the changes of the sea,  
 Like some great music, can but roll  
 Our lives still nearer to the goal.

### OUR LADY OF THE TWILIGHT

Our Lady of the Twilight  
 From out the sunset-lands  
 Comes gently stealing o'er the world  
 And stretches out her hands,  
 Over the blotched and broken wall,  
 The blind and foetid lane,  
 She stretches out her hands and all  
 Is beautiful again.

No factory chimneys can defile  
 The beauty of her dress:  
 She stoops down with her heavenly smile  
 To heal and love and bless:  
 All tortured things, all evil powers,  
 All shapes of dark distress  
 Are turned to fragrance and to flowers  
 Beneath her kind caress.

Our Lady of the Twilight,  
 She melts our prison-bars!  
 She makes the sea forget the shore,  
 She fills the sky with stars.

And stooping over wharf and mill,  
 Chimney and shed and dome,  
 Turns them to fairy palaces,  
 Then calls her children home.

She stoops to bless the stunted tree,  
 And from the furrowed plain,  
 And from the wrinkled brow she smooths  
 The lines of care and pain:  
 Hers are the gentle hands and eyes  
 And hers the peaceful breath  
 That ope, in sunset-softened skies,  
 The quiet gates of death.

*Our Lady of the Twilight,*  
*She hath such gentle hands,*  
*So lovely are the gifts she brings*  
*From out the sunset-lands,*  
*So bountiful, so merciful*  
*So sweet of soul is she;*  
*And over all the world she draws*  
*Her cloak of charity.*

## THE HILL-FLOWERS

*“I will lift up mine eyes to the hills”*

## I

*Moving through the dew, moving through the dew,  
 Ere I waken in the city—Life, thy dawn makes all things new!  
 And up a fir-clad glen, far from all the haunts of men,  
 Up a glen among the mountains, oh my feet are wings again!*

Moving through the dew, moving through the dew,  
 O mountains of my boyhood, I come again to you,  
 By the little path I know, with the sea far below,  
 And above, the great cloud-galleons with their sails of rose and  
 snow;

As of old, when all was young, and the earth a song unsung  
 And the heather through the crimson dawn its Eden incense  
 flung

From the mountain-heights of joy, for a careless-hearted boy,  
And the lavrocks rose like fountain sprays of bliss that ne'er  
could cloy,

From their little beds of bloom, from the golden gorse and  
broom,

With a song to God the Giver, o'er that waste of wild perfume;  
Blowing from height to height, in a glory of great light,  
While the cottage-clustered valleys held the lilac last of night,

So, when dawn is in the skies, in a dream, a dream, I rise,  
And I follow my lost boyhood to the heights of Paradise.  
Life, thy dawn makes all things new! Hills of Youth, I come  
to you,  
Moving through the dew, moving through the dew.

## II

Moving through the dew, moving through the dew,  
Floats a brother's face to meet me! Is it you? Is it you?  
For the night I leave behind keeps these dazzled eyes still blind!  
But oh, the little hill-flowers, their scent is wise and kind;

And I shall not lose the way from the darkness to the day,  
While dust can cling as their scent clings to memory for aye;  
And the least link in the chain can recall the whole again,  
And heaven at last resume its far-flung harvests, grain by grain.

To the hill-flowers clings my dust, and tho' eyeless Death may  
thrust

All else into the darkness, in their heaven I put my trust;  
And a dawn shall bid me climb to the little spread of thyme  
Where first I heard the ripple of the fountain-heads of rhyme.

And a fir-wood that I know, from dawn to sunset-glow,  
Shall whisper to a lonely sea, that swings far, far below.  
Death, thy dawn makes all things new. Hills of Youth, I  
come to you,  
Moving through the dew, moving through the dew.

## THE CAROL OF THE FIR-TREE

Quoth the Fir-tree, “Orange and vine”

*Sing ‘Nowell, Nowell, Nowell’!*

“Have their honour: I have mine!”

*In Excelsis Gloria!*

“I am kin to the great king’s house,”

*Ring ‘Nowell, Nowell, Nowell’!*

“And Lebanon whispers in my boughs.”

*In Excelsis Gloria!*

Apple and cherry, pear and plum,

*Winds of Autumn, sigh ‘Nowell’!*

All the trees like mages come

*Bending low with ‘Gloria’!*

Holding out on every hand

*Summer pilgrims to Nowell!*

Gorgeous gifts from Elfin-land.

*And the May saith ‘Gloria’!*

Out of the darkness—who shall say

*Gold and myrrh for this Nowell!*

How they win their wizard way?

*Out of the East with ‘Gloria’!*

Men that eat of the sun and dew

*Angels laugh and sing, ‘Nowell.’*

Call it “fruit,” and say it “grew”!

*Into the West with ‘Gloria’!*

“Leaves that fall,” whispered the Fir

*Through the forest sing ‘Nowell’!*

“I am winter’s minister.”

*In Excelsis Gloria!*

Summer friends may come and go,

*Up the mountain sing ‘Nowell.’*

Love abides thro’ storm and snow.

*Down the valley, ‘Gloria’!*

“On my boughs, on mine on mine,”

*Father and mother, sing ‘Nowell’!*

“All the fruits of the earth shall twine.”

*Bending low with ‘Gloria.’*

- “Sword of wood and doll of wax”  
*Little children, sing ‘Nowell.’*
- “Swing on the stem was cleft with the axe!”  
*Craftsmen all, a ‘Gloria.’*
- “Hear! I have looked on the other side.”  
*Out of the East, O sing ‘Nowell’!*
- “Because to live this night I died!”  
*Into the West with ‘Gloria.’*
- “Hear! In this lighted room I have found”  
*Ye that seek, O sing ‘Nowell’!*
- “The spell that worketh underground.”  
*Ye that doubt, a ‘Gloria.’*
- “I have found it, even I,”  
*Ye that are lowly, sing ‘Nowell’!*
- “The secret of this alchemy!”  
*Ye that are poor, a ‘Gloria.’*
- “Look, your tinsel turneth to gold.”  
*Sing ‘Nowell! Nowell! Nowell!’*
- “Your dust to a hand for love to hold!”  
*In Excelsis Gloria.*
- “Lay the axe at my young stem now!”  
*Woodman, woodman, sing ‘Nowell.’*
- “Set a star on every bough!”  
*In Excelsis Gloria!*
- “Hall and cot shall see me stand,”  
*Rich and poor man, sing ‘Nowell’!*
- “Giver of gifts from Elfin-land.”  
*Oberon, answer ‘Gloria.’*
- “Hung by the hilt on your Christmas-tree”  
*Little children, sing ‘Nowell’!*
- “Your wooden sword is a cross for me.”  
*Emperors, a ‘Gloria.’*
- “I have found that fabulous stone”  
*Ocean-worthies, cry ‘Nowell.’*
- “Which turneth all things into one,”  
*Wise men all, a ‘Gloria.’*

“It is not ruby nor anything”  
*Jeweller, jeweller, sing ‘Nowell’!*  
 “Fit for the crown of an earthly King:”  
*In Excelsis Gloria!*  
 “It is not here! It is not there!”  
*Traveller, rest and cry ‘Nowell’!*  
 “It is one thing and everywhere!”  
*Heaven and Earth sing ‘Gloria.’*

“It is the earth, the moon, the sun,”  
*Mote in the sunbeam, sing ‘Nowell’!*  
 “And all the stars that march as one.”  
*In Excelsis Gloria!*  
 “Here, by the touch of it, I can see”  
*Sing, O Life, a sweet Nowell!*  
 “The world’s King die on a Christmas-tree.”  
*Answer, Death, with ‘Gloria.’*

“Here, not set in a realm apart,”  
*East and West are one ‘Nowell’!*  
 “Holy Land is in your Heart!”  
*North and South one ‘Gloria’!*  
 “Death is a birth, birth is a death,”  
*Love is all, O sing ‘Nowell’!*  
 “And London one with Nazareth.”  
*And all the World a ‘Gloria.’*

“And angels over your heart’s roof sing”  
*Birds of God, O pour ‘Nowell’!*  
 “That a poor man’s son is the Son of a King!”  
*Out of your heart this ‘Gloria’!*  
 “Round the world you’ll not away”  
*In your own soul, they sing ‘Nowell’!*  
 “From Holy Land this Christmas Day!”  
*In your own soul, this ‘Gloria.’*

## LAVENDER

Lavender, lavender  
 That makes your linen sweet;  
 The hawker brings his basket  
 Down the sooty street:  
 The dirty doors and pavements  
 Are simmering in the heat:  
 He brings a dream to London,  
 And drags his weary feet.

Lavender, lavender,  
 From where the bee hums,  
 To the loud roar of London,  
 With purple dreams he comes,  
 From raggèd lanes of wild-flowers  
 To raggèd London slums,  
 With a basket full of lavender  
 And purple dreams he comes.

Is it nought to you that hear him?  
 With the old strange cry  
 The weary hawker passes,  
 And some will come and buy,  
 And some will let him pass away  
 And only heave a sigh,  
 But most will neither heed nor hear  
 When dreams go by.

*Lavender, lavender!*  
*His songs were fair and sweet,*  
*He brought us harvests out of heaven,*  
*Full sheaves of radiant wheat;*  
*He brought us keys to Paradise,*  
*And hawked them thro' the street;*  
*He brought his dreams to London,*  
*And dragged his weary feet.*

Lavender, lavender!  
He is gone. The sunset glows;  
But through the brain of London  
The mystic fragrance flows.  
Each foggy cell remembers,  
Each raggèd alley knows,  
The land he left behind him,  
The land to which he goes.

